

ORGANIZATIONAL LEADERSHIP IN CRISIS: THE 31ST REGIMENTAL  
COMBAT TEAM AT CHOSIN RESERVOIR, KOREA,  
24 NOVEMBER - 2 DECEMBER 1950

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Military History

by

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## ABSTRACT

ORGANIZATIONAL LEADERSHIP IN CRISIS: THE 31ST REGIMENTAL COMBAT TEAM AT CHOSIN RESERVOIR, KOREA, 24 NOVEMBER - 2 DECEMBER 1950, by Paul T. Berquist, 99 pages.

The 31st Regimental Combat Team (RCT) was created on 24 November 1950. On 27 November it had the mission of relieving the Marines of the 1st Marine Division East of the Chosin reservoir and attacking to the North towards the Yalu River. The unit's battalions and separate companies were spread out along the road from the port of Hungnam in the south to forward positions east of the reservoir over 90 miles away when it was hit by the surprise attack of the Chinese 80th Peoples' Liberation Army (PLA) Division on the evening of 27 November. Organizational leadership failures at the level of the X Corps, 7th Infantry Division, the 31st RCT and its attached battalions all contributed to the almost complete destruction of the RCT by the evening of 1-2 December 1950. These failures led to a very poor situational awareness prior to the Chinese attack and helped create the total breakdown of organizational cohesion and effectiveness that occurred during the unit's ill-fated attempt to breakout of the Chinese encirclement. This thesis shows how decisions that are made at the organizational level are critical to the success of the unit.

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## ACRONYMS

AAA	Anti-Aircraft Artillery
AW	Automatic Weapons
COL	Colonel
CPT	Captain
FA	Field Artillery
FM	Field Manual (official publications of US Army)
HQ	Headquarters
ID	Infantry Division (as in 7th Infantry Division)
IN	Infantry
I&R	Intelligence and Reconnaissance
LTC	Lieutenant Colonel
LTG	Lieutenant General
MAJ	Major
MG	Major General
MSR	Main Supply Route
PLA	Peoples' Liberation Army (Also referred to as the "Chinese People's Volunteers for Chinese Propaganda purposes)
RCT	Regimental Combat Team
ROK	Republic of Korea (official name of what is now South Korea)
S-1	Personnel Staff Section
S-2	Intelligence Staff Section
S-3	Operations (and training) Staff Section
S-4	Logistics Staff Section



SP	Self Propelled (usually tracked) Weapon System (as opposed to a towed system)
XO	Executive Officer (second to the commander)
USAMHI	US Army Military History Institute

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## CHAPTER 1

### INTRODUCTION

The 31st Regimental Combat Team (RCT) was a regimental size task force that was constituted from elements of the 31st and 32d Regiments and other elements of the 7th Infantry Division and X Corps on the east coast of Korea beginning on 24 November 1950. When the 1st Marine Division was ordered to attack westward from the Chosin Reservoir, the 31st Regimental Combat Team (RCT) was ordered to relieve the Marine elements east of the Chosin Reservoir and continue the advance north towards the Yalu River. While the unit was strung out in bivouac positions along the road east of Chosin Reservoir and on the Main Supply Route (MSR) from the port of Hamhung, it was attacked and almost completely destroyed by the Chinese 80th People's Liberation Army (PLA) Division during the period 27 November-2 December 1950. Out of the 3,300 soldiers of the 31st RCT, only 385 walked out of Hagaru-ri with the Marines (1500 wounded were evacuated by air from Hagaru-ri).<sup>1</sup> The only equipment that the soldiers were able to take with them was their small arms.<sup>2</sup> Nearly all of the field grade officers (Majors, Lieutenant Colonels, and Colonel) of the 31st RCT became casualties.

During the same period in which the 31st RCT was being destroyed, the units of the 1st Marine Division on the West side of the reservoir were also attacked by the Chinese in similar circumstances but were able to escape to Hagaru-ri with much of their equipment. Despite heavy losses, they were able to maintain unit integrity. The 31st RCT faced a situation that was distinct from or distinctly different than that faced by the Marines. Their units were dispersed and not expecting an attack by Chinese forces. The surprise attack of the Chinese created a crisis that the leaders of the 31st RCT and their

higher headquarters at 7th Infantry Division and at X Corps had to address given the situation and what they had available.

In a crisis, information is often incomplete, and many things are unknown. In this type of environment with a rapidly developing situation there is little time for slow methodical planning and analysis and a managerial style of leadership. The key to leadership in these situations is to have leaders that can grasp the essential aspects of the situation, while at the same time applying sufficient analysis and planning to mitigate the confusion in units created by the crisis.

The key question to be addressed in this thesis is: Where do failures in organizational leadership appear to have contributed to the destruction of the 31st RCT by the attack of the 80th PLA? Organizational leadership includes the actions of not only the Corps, Division, RCT and Battalion commanders but also of their staff. What were the key decision points that were missed by the commanders and their staffs that could have influenced the outcome positively? What was the role of the field grade officers in influencing the decision making of the commanders? To what degree did the leadership experience of the key leaders and the command climate that they created in their units contribute to the situation? To what degree did situational factors such as weather, terrain, enemy, and unit composition/supply limit the options of the leaders?

The new *Army Leadership* manual, FM 6-22, discusses the aspects which distinguish organizational from direct leadership in Chapter 11. An organizational level leader still influences subordinates directly but influences several hundred to several thousand people often indirectly. An important aspect of organizational level leadership is to organize systems to address tactical and operational problems. The issues faced by

an organizational level leader are more complex, with less certainty, and a much larger impact from the leader's decisions. A key attribute of organizational leaders is to demonstrate the intellectual capacity to comprehend these complex situations and the potential unintended consequences from the leader's decisions.<sup>3</sup>

The FM 6-22, *Army Leadership*, further divides leadership requirements in its leadership requirements model into two categories, attributes and competencies. A leader's attributes are defined as: "What an army leader is" and core leader competencies as "What an army leader does."<sup>4</sup> Attributes are further broken down into Character, Presence and Intellectual Capacity. Core Leader Competencies are broken down into Leading, Developing, and Achieving [results]. This Army Leadership Requirements Model provides an excellent framework to examine the leadership of the key leaders who had an important impact on the 31st RCT.<sup>5</sup> Aspects of the leader attribute of intellectual capacity become even more important at the organizational level. These include mental agility, sound judgment, innovation, interpersonal tact, and domain knowledge. A key aspect of the leader competency of leading is the ability to communicate effectively. This includes communicating to one's subordinates and to one's higher headquarters. The most important aspect of competency is the ability to achieve results. Key to this aspect of competency is to define what results are achievable and what must be accomplished in order to achieve them.

By determining the answers to the research questions, this thesis will lead to a better understanding by the military officer on the role of leadership at the organizational level in dealing with a crisis. It will provide possible answers to the following questions: What aspects of leadership, experience, and training permit Army leaders to succeed in

combat situations where the situation takes a dramatic change for the worse? How can we prepare leaders to face these kinds of situations?

### Review of Literature

The key problem with determining what exactly happened to the 31st RCT is that many of the key individuals were killed. Other key individuals were severely wounded early on in the operation and played little or no role in what happened subsequently. The starting document for most research is the incomplete and very general 7th Infantry Division report entitled “Special Report on Chosin Reservoir” which covers the period 27 November – 12 December 1950. It is not known who prepared this report although it is believed that the 31st Regiment’s S-3, LTC Barry K. Anderson, provided much of the information for this report. X Corps also prepared a report on actions around the reservoir entitled “Chosin Reservoir 27 November – 10 December 1950” that has general information. Most interesting is the G-2 intelligence overlays (see Figure 1, p. 22) that show only one or two Chinese divisions in the Chosin reservoir area (as opposed to the sixteen that were actually there).

Much of what we know of the units of the RCT that were cut off is from the accounts of the survivors themselves. Several key individuals such as members of the Regimental staff (S1 MAJ Hugh W. Robbins, S2/S3 MAJ Carl G. Witte), members of 1/32 IN staff (XO, MAJ Crosby P. Miller; S-1, MAJ Robert E. Jones; S3, MAJ Wesley Curtis; and the Marine Forward Air Controller (FAC), Capt. Edward P. Stamford, USMC), and other personnel involved such as the X Corps commander (LTG Almond) and the 7th Infantry Division commander (MG Barr) have diaries, notes or briefings that have provided a record of their experiences in the campaign. Many of these personal

accounts and correspondence by the survivors with the author Roy Appleman can be found in the Roy Appleman collection at the US Army Military History Institute (USAMHI) archives at Carlisle, Pennsylvania. USAMHI also has transcripts of Chosin Reservoir survivors' accounts of their experiences as part of their oral history archives of Korean War veterans.

There are no surviving unit records of the units cut off and destroyed east of the reservoir. Unit logs, reports, and operations orders of the 31st Regiment, 1st Marine Division, 7th Infantry Division and X Corps provide some detail about the communications of the 31st RCT with their higher headquarters and other unit actions. The problem with unit logs is that many times they say things like "31st RCT requested air drop of ammunition" without indicating what kind and quantity of ammunition was requested. Operation orders are a good source of the official instructions/orders that a unit received. What is often lacking from them is the other information that is conveyed often verbally such as 'why we are doing this' or 'watch out for ...', or 'this is what we see happening next.'

One of the first comprehensive studies of the lessons learned about the Chosin Reservoir was MAJ Robert M. Coombs' 1975 Master of Military Art and Science (MMAS) thesis, "Changjin (Chosin) Reservoir, Korea: 1950: A Case Study of United States Army Tactics and Doctrine for Encircled Forces." One of MAJ Coombs important conclusions was that at the time of 31st RCT's demise at the Chosin Reservoir, the Army did not have official doctrine for how to conduct breakout operations, nor was discussion of such operations part of the curriculum at service schools.

A detailed and factually accurate account of the 31st RCT at Chosin Reservoir is the book *East of Chosin: Entrapment and Breakout in Korea, 1950* by Roy E. Appleman, originally published in 1987. Appleman is an accomplished military historian and author of the official U.S. Army history of the Korean War up to November 24, 1950, *South to the Naktong, North to the Yalu*. Appleman supplemented information from official unit records and reports with extensive interviews and lengthy correspondence with the survivors conducted over a period of seven years in preparing his book. As part of his research, Appleman systematically worked to determine the facts about what happened and analyze factors that could have affected the outcome more favorably. One weakness of the book is that Appleman has limited criticism of LTC Faith and his leadership.

Martin Russ' book *Breakout, the Chosin Reservoir Campaign, Korea 1950*, published in 1999, is an account of the Marine experience at Chosin. While much of it is anecdotal, it is also descriptive about the experiences of the soldiers in the mountainous environment and the nature of combat with the Chinese. Most importantly it provides some perspective on the overall campaign plan and on the interactions that the Marines had with the X Corps commander, LTG Almond. This provides important details about the kind of relationships that LTG Almond had with his subordinates and how he handled disagreements with his subordinates about their assessment of the military situation. The most important lesson from this book is the differences between the relationships that LTG Almond had with the 1st Marine Division commander and the U.S. Army commander of 7th Infantry Division. LTG Almond had less power over the Marine division commander because he was from another service, and LTG Almond would have



had a greater difficulty in relieving him or otherwise negatively affecting his career than he would with MG Barr, a fellow U.S. Army officer.

Shelby L. Stanton's book, *America's Tenth Legion, X Corps in Korea, 1950*, is a good history of the X Corps including its formation, leading role in the Inchon invasion, transfer of operations to the east coast of Korea and advance to the Yalu, the Chinese counter-attack, and the retreat to and evacuation from the port of Hamhung.

Understandably, Stanton includes a lot of information about the Corps commander, LTG Almond and his leadership of and interaction with his subordinate commanders and staff.

Much of the scholarship about the Chosin Reservoir campaign has sought to answer the question of why the two Marine Regiments (5th and 7th Marines) were able to maintain unit cohesion as they fought their way back through the Chinese forces blocking their way to Hagaru-ri, whereas unit cohesion in the 31st RCT was lost. One such study is Donald K. Wol's 2004 Master of Military Art and Science (MMAS) thesis: "The Relationship between Cohesion and Casualty Rates: The 1st Marine Division and the 7th Infantry Division at Inchon and the Chosin Reservoir." Another important article is Faris R. Kirkland's study entitled "Soldiers and Marines at Chosin Reservoir: Criteria for Assignment to Combat Command." Kirkland compares the combat experience and schooling of field grade officers in the 31st RCT with the field grade officers of the 1st Marine Division at the Chosin Reservoir.

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<sup>1</sup>Faris R. Kirkland, "Soldiers and Marines at Chosin Reservoir: Criteria for assignment to Combat Command," *Armed Forces and Society* 22, no. 2 (winter 1995-1996): 261.

<sup>2</sup>Shelby L. Stanton, *America's Tenth Legion, X Corps in Korea, 1950* (Novato, CA: Presidio Press, 1989), 223.

<sup>3</sup>US Army, FM 6-22, *Leadership* (Washington, DC: HQ DA, 12 October 2006), 3-7. See also Chapter 11, pages 11-1 to 11-11.

<sup>4</sup>US Army, FM 6-22, 2-4.

<sup>5</sup>US Army, FM 6-22, A-1.

## CHAPTER 2

### BACKGROUND OF THE UNIT AND LEADERS

#### Background of the Unit

The 31st RCT was an ad hoc organization created on extremely short notice from various elements of 7th Infantry Division and X Corps. Many of the units were informed that they were to be attached to the RCT at the same time that they received their orders to move. The 31st regimental headquarters was designated to provide the RCT's headquarters along with its organic 2/31 IN battalion and 3/31 IN battalion (2/31 IN was attached to the RCT after the Chinese attacked and never reached the rest of the unit). The 1/32 IN battalion was added because it was the closest unit to the Chosin Reservoir at the time (24 November 1950). The RCT was rounded out with the two 105mm gun firing battery 57th FA battalion (-)(including a headquarters and a small service battery) , an ADA battery (-), a tank company, and the regiment's organic medical detachment/company and service company. The battalions moved most of their troops to Chosin reservoir using X Corps truck assets. It is important to note that the 31st RCT only existed on paper; it was still in the process of being gathered together when the Chinese attacked.

The 31st Regiment had experienced numerous organizational changes in the years preceding the Korean War. Coupled with numerous changes in mission and the experience of various adversities, all affected the cohesion and training level of the unit. The 31st regiment had a reputation as a "hard luck" unit. The regiment was the only regiment in the United States Army that had been initially raised overseas. The unit participated in the 1919 Siberia campaign and in 1942 was one of the U.S. units

surrendered at Bataan and underwent the infamous “Bataan Death March.” Reconstituted after World War II, the Regiment was part of the U.S. occupation force in Korea until in 1948 it moved to Japan. The unit experienced a high turnover of personnel as only soldiers that had a certain amount of time on their enlistment went with the unit to Japan. When these soldiers’ enlistments ran out in turn, the unit experienced a high turn-over of experienced personnel. The regiment often was the last to receive replacements or did not receive any as a batch of replacements arrived. During the occupation of Japan, the regiment was isolated from the rest of the division on the Japanese island of Hokkaido. The island’s training areas did not support training exercises above the battalion level. Even so, the unit was constantly in the field and the unit achieved a high state of readiness by the time the Korean War started.<sup>1</sup> During the period before the Korean War, for a time under the direction of Secretary of the Army Johnson, the Army divisions had been reduced to two battalions per regiment and two firing batteries per FA battalion.<sup>2</sup> With the beginning of the Korean War on 25 June 1950, the US Army scrambled to create a third battalion for each division.<sup>3</sup> This would be a problem especially as the divisions built a third battalion from scratch (such as 3/31 IN). By the time the 31st RCT was at Chosin, the 3/31 IN had been functioning as an organization for four to five months.

Another recent development affecting the 31st RCT was that after the Korean War began, the 7th Infantry Division was stripped of many of its experienced soldiers and NCOs to fill other units of Eighth Army fighting in the Pusan perimeter in Southeastern Korea. When the unit was selected to participate in the Inchon landing, the unit was short about a third of its strength. These shortages were made up by the addition

of over 3000 KATUSAs (Korean Army To US Army) augmentees. These Korean individuals had been picked up off the streets of Korea. Very few had any sort of military training and most spoke little or no English. The KATUSAs arrived only a week or two before the division embarked for the Inchon invasion, so their training was limited at best. Many of the units paired a US soldiers with a KATUSA soldier.<sup>4</sup> This often created situations where two individuals in a foxhole could not speak to each other. Often the American soldiers were incensed when the KATUSA soldiers would fall asleep during their watch during the night. Many of the KATUSAs deserted at the first opportunity. The situation of having one third of the unit as KATUSA augmentees created a serious problem of unit cohesion and communication, and especially training for combat.

The 7th Infantry Division also received 37 majors that had recently graduated from Command and General Staff College (CGSC) in July 1950 right before the division departed for the Inchon landing. These officers were proficient in Army doctrine, but lacked knowledge of the unit and its personnel. However, by the time of the Chosin reservoir battle, these officers were integrated into the division (having been assigned to the unit for three to four months).

#### Background of Key Organizational Level Leaders

There are numerous commanders and staff members at the X Corps, 7th Division, the 31st RCT and its subordinate battalions whose organizational level leadership impacted on the fate of the 31st RCT. The following four commanders all played the most critical roles in the fate of the 31st RCT: LTG Almond, X Corps Commander, MG Barr, 7th Infantry Division Commander, COL MacLean, 31st RCT Commander, and LTC Don Faith, Commander of 1/32 IN battalion and later of the all the elements of RCT

that were cut off from other U.S. forces on the east side of the Chosin Reservoir. We will examine their leadership characteristics and history in more detail. COL MacLean was killed during the initial break-out effort of 1/32 IN as it rejoined 3/31 IN and 57 FA battalions at the P'ungnyuri inlet, and thus mostly played a role in the beginning half of the 31st RCT's crisis.

Other leaders who played less significant roles in the fate of the 31st RCT included BG Hodes, the well-respected 7th Infantry Assistant Division Commander, who also played an important role although not in a direct command position. LTC Reilly, the 3/31 IN Commander, was severely wounded on the first night of the Chinese attack, so his actions as a leader are limited to the initial selection of and movement of his unit into the position at P'ungnyuri inlet. LTC Reidy, the 2/31 IN Commander, received his orders to move his unit to the Chosin Reservoir late and never reached Hagaru-ri (was stopped by the Chinese in the vicinity of Koto-ri). LTC Anderson, the 31st RCT S-3, was the senior officer at the 31st RCT main command post (which was unable to join the rest of the RCT's units at the P'ungnyuri inlet). He was later given the responsibility of organizing a relief effort of Army units from Hagaru-ri in an effort to break through to the surrounded units under LTC Faith's command. This relief effort never departed Hagaru-ri. LTC Anderson had been ordered to execute this on 2 December, which would have been too late even if it had been attempted.

A number of majors from the 1/32 Battalion, 31st RCT, 7th Division and X Corps played significant roles in the situation of the 31st RCT. The most prominent of these were the very experienced Majors of the 1/32 IN Battalion: the XO, MAJ Miller, the S3, MAJ Curtis, and the S1 MAJ Jones. MAJ Witte, the 31st RCT S-2, MAJ Robbins, the

31st RCT, S-1, and MAJ Lynch, 7th Infantry Division Liaison Officer assisting BG Hodes also played a role in and contributed to our understanding of what happened at Chosin to the 31st RCT.

LTG Almond, the X Corps Commander, played a very significant role with the fate of the 31st RCT. LTG Almond had been a machine gun battalion commander during the First World War. The key to his success in that war was his direct leadership, moving rapidly around the battlefield seeing to the emplacement of his machine guns in positions where they could be used to greatest effect. LTG Almond exhibited that style of leadership throughout his career. One of his contemporaries described him as “being aggressive when he needed to be aggressive and aggressive when he needed to be cautious.”<sup>5</sup> LTG Almond was a mobility oriented commander who saw himself as a successor to the “fast and bold” Confederate raiders of the Shenandoah Valley during the U.S. Civil War.<sup>6</sup> During World War II he was selected to command the 92d Infantry Division, a “colored” unit, by the Army Chief of Staff, General Marshall.<sup>7</sup> Purportedly he was selected because as a Virginian he would “know how to work with colored troops.”<sup>8</sup> The unit performed dismally and General Almond attributed it to having colored troops.<sup>8</sup> The key point here is that he had denigrated the fighting qualities of his men because of their race rather than by more objective criteria. He was sent over to the Far East Command under General Douglas MacArthur as his Assistant Chief of Staff. General MacArthur selected him to command the newly created X Corps to lead the Inchon invasion. LTG Almond believed in leading from the front. He would often show up at a battalion and issue orders directly to the battalion commander (skipping the division and

regimental levels of command). He has been described as being “obsessed with total, direct control of every frontline aspect” of operations.<sup>9</sup>

LTG Almond was technically brilliant. He was very insistent on combined arms tactics and realistic fire support training. He was especially insistent on having Close Air Support (CAS) Tactical Air Control Parties (TACP) down to the battalion level and prided himself on this being an X Corps priority. However, his brusque leadership style alienated many of his subordinates. MG Smith, the commander of the 1st Marine Division, was especially critical of Almond’s inability to realize the true situation of the Chinese intervention in Korea.

MG Barr, the 7th Infantry Division Commander, was quite different in his leadership style than Almond, and was considered by many to be indecisive. MG Barr had served before the war as an observer in China during the civil war between the Nationalists and the Communists. He had been offered five or six positions by General MacArthur but refused them all. When he was finally offered command of the 7th Infantry Division, he turned that down as well. He was told by MacArthur that he had to take command of the division. LTG Almond was disappointed with the performance of the 7th Infantry Division during the Inchon invasion. LTG Almond wrote a scathing letter to MG Barr about the performance of the division. The letter basically put MG Barr on notice that he was subject to relief at any time. After this MG Barr told his subordinates that anything LTG Almond wanted, he was to get immediately.<sup>10</sup> Perhaps some of MG Barr’s indecisiveness was due to the tenuous hold on his command. During the Chosin Reservoir campaign, LTG Almond and the X Corps staff often ordered the 7th Infantry Division units around as they saw fit with little or no consultation with the division.



LTC Faith was the commander of 1/32 IN and later of the remnants of the 31st RCT that were cut off together on the east side of the reservoir. He had come from a distinguished military family. Members of the Faith family had fought in the U.S. Army since the American Revolution. His father was a general. His brother was also in the Army and was killed in World War II.<sup>11</sup> Before the Korean War, LTC Faith had worked with MG Barr in China as part of a US military observation team. Presumably he thus had some first hand knowledge of Communist Chinese tactics and capabilities. LTC Faith was young for a lieutenant colonel by today's standards, only thirty-four. More importantly, he had never commanded a platoon or company before he commanded 1/32 IN. Commissioned as a 2nd Lieutenant in 1942; LTC Faith spent most of the war as General Ridgeway's aide, rising to the rank of Lieutenant Colonel by the end of the war. Between World War II and the conflict in Korea, he did not have any command experience. He was exempted from going to Command and General Staff School between the wars because he was given "credit" for his World War II service. Thus by 1950, LTC Faith had only been in the Army for eight years with no command experience at lower levels of command.

Prior to the Korean War, LTC Faith was commanding the 1/32 IN as part of the occupation of Japan. At one point COL MacLean was his regimental commander. Faith was well known in the airborne community and wanted to get airborne qualified officers to fill his Battalion XO and S3 positions. He was compelled by LTG Almond, through MG Barr, the 7th Division commander, to accept two highly competent officers, MAJ Wesley Curtis and MAJ Miller (part of the 47 that were sent to the division upon completion of command and staff school before the Inchon invasion), to be his XO and

S3.<sup>12</sup> His efforts to manipulate the personnel system to get the kinds of officers that he wanted reflect poorly on LTC Faith. It may be that he sought to use his high reputation and influence with MG Barr to get majors assigned to his unit whose qualities were known to him, rather than getting two majors of unknown quality (one, MAJ Miller, was an Armor officer). In actuality, MAJ Curtis and MAJ Miller were highly experienced officers who were to play major roles in the future operations of the battalion including at Chosin. Perhaps if LTC Faith had had his way, he might have got two majors who were as inexperienced as himself in leading at the organizational level. All in all, LTC Faith was highly liked and respected by his subordinates. One example of this is in his actions when one of his officers got promoted. He purchased meat from local Koreans with his own funds and had a promotion party with the officers of his battalion on the beach. This event was looked back upon with fondness by his subordinates even after going through adversity later with him. His youth and charisma, and his drive to accomplish the mission made him a positive direct leader and created a “can-do” attitude in his organization.

#### Experience of the Leaders From Inchon to Chosin

Shortly after the Inchon invasion, as the X Corps was attacking into Seoul, LTG Almond formed a negative impression of LTC Faith because of a couple of incidents. The first incident occurred while the unit was approaching the Han River in Seoul from the south. Apparently his advance platoon encountered some enemy in the Anyang-ni area and LTC Faith ordered his platoon to retreat two miles when there was no need to be cautious.<sup>13</sup>

The second incident occurred when LTC Faith had been ordered to cross the Han River. LTG Almond sent a message to MG Barr criticizing LTC Faith for his delay in

crossing the Han River, accusing him of a lack of aggressiveness. General Barr told General Hodes that LTG Almond was “greatly concerned over Faith’s failure to use his communications and automatic and supporting weapons in action of A & B Co’s this afternoon.”<sup>14</sup> Other officers on the Corps and Division staff were aware of this message as it was sent through the corps headquarters to be forwarded to MG Barr. It can not be determined if LTC Faith knew of this message or if MG Barr talked to him about it. Given that officers on the Corps staff were aware of it, and the fact that MG Barr knew and highly respected LTC Faith from working with him as an U.S. Army observer in China, it is highly likely that MG Barr spoke to LTC Faith about it during the next two months before the fighting east of the Chosin Reservoir. The key point here is that when an officer’s competence is questioned in such a public manner, the officer is much more likely to over-compensate with aggressiveness in order to counter-act the assessment by his superior that he lacks aggressiveness. The other key point here is that by intentionally or un-intentionally indicating that aggressiveness was the key attribute expected of his subordinates, LTG Almond sent a clear signal to MG Barr that that attribute would be the chief yardstick by which competence would be evaluated.

Although it took a couple of hours longer than LTG Almond expected, once across the Han river, LTC Faith’s battalion swiftly moved out and reached its objectives against minimal North Korean resistance. LTC Faith was energetic in moving about his command and encouraging his soldiers. The key point here is that the battalion received little combat experience in this encounter, mostly from a defeated and retreating North Korean Army.

While the 32nd Regiment was crossing the river, the 31st was sent south of Seoul to defeat North Korean forces fleeing north and to link-up with Eighth Army. The 31st saw little combat during this operation except with a large force of North Koreans including T-34 tanks who were fleeing north up the main road from Seoul. The regiment fixed the force with one battalion and maneuvered another battalion on to the enemy force's flank to decisively defeat them. During these operations, the 2/31 commander became a casualty and was replaced by LTC Reidy. Although the regiment was successful, it made slower progress than LTG Almond expected.<sup>15</sup>

After the seizure of Seoul and the link-up of X Corps with Eighth Army attacking out of the Pusan perimeter in the south, General MacArthur made the decision to pass the Eighth Army north through the X Corps. The X Corps was to be embarked at Pusan and brought to the east coast of Korea. While the 31st Regiment was in the midst of making the preparations to conduct the overland movement from the Seoul area to Pusan, LTG Almond directed that they conduct battalion level live fire training exercises the next day (the day before the move). LTG Almond felt that the 31st Regiment's commander, COL Overshine, was too old to command. He was dissatisfied with the performance of the Regiment during the Inchon invasion and was close to relieving Overshine. The battalion staffs were in the midst of planning the overland movement to Pusan when the short notice order to prepare for battalion live fire exercises came down. Some of their equipment had already been shipped by train. The exercises were conducted the day before the unit was to move to Pusan. The battalions performed poorly during the live fire exercises and LTG Almond decided to relieve COL Overshine. He replaced him with COL MacLean who had commanded the Regiment before.

After the move to Pusan the 31st Regiment and 1/32 IN Battalion spent most of the next month on ships waiting to disembark at the port of Hamhung on the east coast of Korea and in assembly areas once they had landed. The sum total of the 1/32 IN battle experience was the unopposed river crossing at the Han River into Seoul and a few days of combat against the scattered resistance from some of the remnants of the North Korean army in the city. The 31st Regiment had conducted a few days of combat operations destroying North Korean forces fleeing north from the Pusan perimeter and conducting the link-up with Eighth Army. Neither the 31st Regiment nor the 1/32 IN had had to fight with any enemy forces larger than a battalion at a time. They had been on the offensive the entire time. They had none of the experience of the battle hardened units of Eighth Army who had held off the determined and relentless attacks of the North Korean army. More importantly, their key leaders such as the Corps commander, LTG Almond, had mostly encountered success. The coming adversity would challenge their leadership to the utmost.<sup>16</sup>

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<sup>1</sup>Shelby L. Stanton, *America's Tenth Legion, X Corps in Korea, 1950* (Novato, CA: Presidio Press, 1989), 84.

<sup>2</sup>Wesley J. Curtis, Letter to Roy E. Appleman 20 February 1978, Box 8, Appleman Collection, USAMHI, Carlisle, PA.

<sup>3</sup>John B. Wilson, *Maneuver and Firepower: The Evolution of Divisions and Separate Brigades*, Army Lineage Series (Washington, DC: Center of Military History, US Army, 1998), 269; available from <http://www.army.mil/cmh-pg/books/Lineage/M-F/chapter9.htm>.

<sup>4</sup>Mortrude, Letter to Merrill A Needham Jr. Ph.D. 23 Mar 86, Box 6, Appleman Collection, USAMHI, Carlisle, PA.

<sup>5</sup>Russell A. Gugeler, Letter to Merrill A. Needham Jr., 10 December 1984. Gugeler had served in X Corps staff during the Korean War and had formed a personal impression of LTG Almond. He both loathed LTG Almond and respected him in other

ways. This three page letter is a good description of what one officer who worked under LTG Almond felt about him and his leadership style. He is knowledgeable about what was talked about in the headquarters about LTG Almond and other leaders (such as LTC Faith) behind their backs.

<sup>6</sup>Stanton, *America's Tenth Legion, X Corps in Korea, 1950*. Stanton has a good summary of LTG Almond's leadership style and his relationship with subordinate commanders and staff.

<sup>7</sup>Roy E. Appleman, Background notes from conversations with LTG (Ret) Almond, Box 6, Appleman Collection, USAMHI, Carlisle, PA.

<sup>8</sup>Merrill A. Needham, Letter to Russell A. Gugeler, 7 December 1984, Box 8, Appleman Collection, USAMHI, Carlisle, PA. Needham discusses research that he has done in general terms that indicates that LTC Almond was not a very effective division commander in World War II.

<sup>9</sup>Stanton, 92.

<sup>10</sup>Stanton, 135.

<sup>11</sup>Merrill A. Needham, Letter to Russell A. Gugeler, 18 December 1984, Box 8, Appleman Collection, USAMHI, Carlisle, PA.

<sup>12</sup>Roy E. Appleman, Letter to Crosby P. Miller, 5 January 1979, Box 7, Appleman Collection, USAMHI, Carlisle, PA.

<sup>13</sup>Roy E. Appleman, Letter to Robert E. Jones, 12 January 1979, Box 7, Appleman Collection, USAMHI, Carlisle, PA.

<sup>14</sup>William R. Lynch, Letter to Roy E. Appleman, 21 January 1977, including copy of 7th Division log message sent at 2100, 26 September 1950, Log Entry Nr. 277 from MG Barr to BG Hodes, Box 7, Appleman Collection, USAMHI, Carlisle, PA.

<sup>15</sup>Stanton, 107.

<sup>16</sup>Stanton – See Chapter on Inchon Invasion.

## CHAPTER 3

### LEADERSHIP & INTELLIGENCE, OCTOBER – NOVEMBER 1950

The Chinese attack on the 31st RCT on the evening of 27 November 1950 came as a complete surprise. A major part of the Chinese ability to surprise the 31st RCT was their ability to conceal their movements. Thus the intelligence staff at Corps, Division, and RCT level had limited information about the locations and intentions of Chinese units in the vicinity of the Chosin Reservoir. However, leadership played the key role in the handling and assessment of the information that was available.

#### Sources of Intelligence Information to the 31st RCT

The Chinese made their surprise attack on 27 November 1950. They attacked not only the 31st RCT on this date, but also the 1st Marine Division on the west and south side of the reservoir. At the time of the attack General MacArthur's Far East Command and the X Corps intelligence staff estimated that there were the remnants of one or two divisions in the Chosin Reservoir area that they were retreating towards the Yalu River (Figure 1). In actuality there were 16 full strength PLA divisions. The Chinese plan was to cut the lines of communications of the Marine and Army regiments in the area of Chosin reservoir and destroy them. The Chinese were able to conceal their forces by a number of means including moving at night and concealing their forces in buildings or woods during the day. The U.S. military was dependent on aerial reconnaissance and thus were not able to detect the Chinese by other more traditional methods of scouting and patrolling.



Figure 1. X Corps Enemy Situation Map, Morning 26 November 1950  
 Source: X Corps, "Special Report on Chosin Reservoir Operation (Korea) X Corps, 27 Nov-10 Dec 50." Document # S-17055.36, NS 17258.6-A, Combined Arms Research Library (CARL), Fort Leavenworth, KS.



X Corps relied upon Far East Command for their operational level intelligence because they were extremely limited as far as intelligence assets that they controlled. Because they received their operational level intelligence information and analysis directly from Far East Command, the X Corps staff tended to pass on the conclusions of Far East Command to LTG Almond.

The 7th Infantry Division provided no intelligence assets or information to the 31st RCT other than that provided to them by X Corps. Up until the RCT was created, the 7th Division was not conducting operations in the vicinity of the Chosin reservoir, so they were unable to provide any information about Chinese operations or intentions there.

The 31st RCT's reconnaissance assets were limited to the regimental ISR platoon. The battalions were limited to sending out foot patrols to obtain their own intelligence and situational awareness. One advantage of having KATUSAs throughout the unit was that they could talk to any Korean civilians in the area that might have been aware of Chinese activities. Usually Koreans that spoke the most English or were able to speak Chinese were assigned to the Battalion S-2 to help process information from Korean civilians and captured Chinese prisoners.

#### Not the First Surprise Attack by the Chinese

The attack of the 16 PLA divisions in the Chosin reservoir area came as a complete surprise to X Corps. This aspect of being completely surprised is the key reason why the 31st RCT was strung out along the road east of the reservoir in temporary bivouac positions on the evening of 27 November 1950 when the Chinese attacked. The inability of aerial reconnaissance to detect the Chinese explains why the intelligence staffs did not know the strength and intentions of the Chinese in the area. However, the

poor intelligence does not explain the disposition of the 31st RCT in what was basically a regimental level march order where contact was not expected with the enemy. This was due to a failure of leadership in evaluating the situation and what was known about the Chinese at that time.

The Chinese first entered Korea in October of 1950 after UN forces continued north of the 38th parallel and the North Korean capital of Pyongyang. US air reconnaissance failed to detect their infiltration due to the Chinese success at moving at night and concealing themselves during the day. During the period 25 October – 2 November 1950 their units surprised and vigorously attacked Eighth Army in the west (north of Pyongyang) and the 1st Marine Division moving up the pass to Koto-Ri and the Chosin reservoir. One U.S regimental sized unit, the 8th Cavalry Regiment on the eastern flank of Eighth Army, was cut off and surrounded in a mountain valley by two Chinese divisions. The Chinese were able to prevent the 8th Cavalry Regiment from breaking out and the unit survivors had to abandon their equipment and return to U.S. lines over the mountains.<sup>1</sup>

There are a number of key elements in the disaster that befell the 8th Cavalry Regiment that it holds in common with the destruction of the 31st RCT. First, the US unit had advanced swiftly up a valley and was separated from other US units. Second, the Chinese had been able to infiltrate through the mountains and attack by surprise cutting off the unit from other units to the south. Third, other friendly UN units in the vicinity were also attacked and unable to breakthrough to the 8th Cavalry. Finally, the surrounded unit gradually ran out of ammunition and fuel and had to abandon its wounded and the survivors had to escape over the mountains. Some of the lessons that could have been

learned from the experience of the 8th Cavalry include the importance of concentrating combat power so that the battalions of the regiment could support each other, the importance of securing high ground adjacent to the route of march, and the need to have a force capable of breaking through to the encircled force.

The lessons learned from this disaster were not incorporated into the decision making of the X Corps in the planning which led up to the destruction of the 31st RCT. It is not clear what LTG Almond knew about what had happened to the 8th Cavalry. He was told by Eighth Army that the unit had had poor security and had been surprised.

X Corps units (mainly 1st Marine Division) had encountered the 126th PLA division in the valley going up to the Chosin reservoir. In heavy fighting, supported by ample artillery fire and air support, the Marines were able to make progress up the valley. LTG Almond interviewed some captured Chinese prisoners on 30 October. General Almond was not impressed with their discipline or soldierly qualities. However, he was sufficiently alarmed that these prisoners confirmed to him that the Chinese had entered the war. He passed this information to General MacArthur as an urgent message.

### X Corps goes on the Defensive

Based on the devastation caused by the Chinese against Eighth Army and the vigor with which the Chinese pressed their attacks against X Corps, LTG Almond decided to pull the X Corps back into a consolidated defense in the vicinity of the port of Hamhung. In a Far East Command conference on 6 November, General MacArthur had confirmed to him the reality that the Chinese had decisively entered the war. At a X Corps conference on 7 November with the commanders of 1st Marine Division, MG Smith, and 7th Infantry Division, MG Barr, LTG Almond made the decision to pull his

forces into a tight perimeter around the port of Hamhung. The commanders believed that if their forces were concentrated into a defensive perimeter, they could defeat the Chinese with their superior fire power and expose the advancing Chinese to US airpower. Once the Chinese attack had been defeated, X Corps could renew its offensive to the Yalu River.

The brunt of the Chinese attack and the disasters to US and ROK forces had occurred in Eighth Army's sector. As a result, LTG Almond was not mentally prepared for what the Chinese were capable of. Thus the key lessons from the initial attack of the Chinese were not learned at this moment and applied to future operations, especially in the case of the 31st RCT.

#### The Chinese Pull Back and MacArthur Orders Renewal of Offensive

After the battles of 25 October to 2 November in which they had severely mauled elements of the ROK army and the 8th US Army, the Chinese decided that they had made their point that they would use military force if necessary to prevent the creation of a unified non-communist state on their border with Korea. The Chinese ceased their offensive operations and withdrew from contact with ROK and United Nations forces. The reason for this withdrawal along the entire front was a mystery to the commanders and staff of MacArthur's Far East Command, as well as Eighth Army in the west and X Corps in the east. As the days went on with no further Chinese attacks, General MacArthur made the conclusion that the Chinese had exhausted their efforts and were now retreating. He gave orders for the offensive to begin again to re-unify Korea. Part of this decision was based on reports from US airpower that they were unable to find many targets to strike. The inability of US air-based reconnaissance to locate the Chinese forces

in their initial infiltration had led to the surprise of the initial attacks. The failure of that same air-based reconnaissance to find the Chinese after the Chinese pulled back from the UN lines and concealed themselves, led to MacArthur's decision to renew the offensive.

As the Marines moved forward in the area of the Chosin Reservoir, they received increasing intelligence from captured Chinese prisoners that there were a number of divisions in the Chosin Reservoir area and that their mission was to cut off the Marines from their supply line to the south. The overreliance by LTG Almond on intelligence obtained from Far East Command while discounting the intelligence gathered by his subordinates would be one of the causes of the poor disposition of the 31st RCT when the Chinese attacked. Because of the poor personal relationships between LTG Almond and MG Smith, the commander of the 1st Marine Division, it is quite possible that the Marines did not pass on all the intelligence they were getting locally about major Chinese forces in their area of operations and about the intentions of those forces. MAJ Lynch, an Assistant G-3 for 7th Infantry Division, listened to the X Corps briefing on the morning of 27 November. He did not hear of any Chinese in the Marine Division's area during the brief by the Corps G-2, LTC Quinn.<sup>2</sup>

On 11 November, only four days after the X Corps conference in which he had ordered a retreat to a defensive perimeter in the vicinity of the port of Hungnam, General Almond ordered a renewed offensive by the 1st Marine Division towards the Chosin Reservoir. 7th Infantry Division and other ROK units were ordered to advance towards the Yalu River. The Marines attacked through the Funchilin Pass to the village of Koto-ri south of Chosin Reservoir. By this time the weather was extremely cold and windy with low visibility. The few Chinese that they did encounter withdrew without attempting to

engage. With these kinds of contacts with Chinese forces, and the lack of any more specific information on Chinese troop movements and intentions, it is understandable why LTG Almond and the X Corps staff's perceptions reinforced the general consensus coming from Far East Command that these were only "scattered remnants" fleeing northward. It seems that the reality was that these Chinese forces were themselves patrols ascertaining the locations of the Marine front lines with orders to withdraw upon contact. It would also seem that forces "fleeing northward" would not be found in small groups probing "southward."

By 20 November the Marines had occupied the town of Hagaru-ri at the south end of the reservoir. On 21 November, X Corps issued Operation Order no. 8 ordering the 1st Marine Division to attack northwestward to Yudam-ni on the west side of the reservoir and then west over the Taebek Mountains into the flank of the Chinese forces facing Eighth Army. In the west, Eighth Army was attacking north moving along the roads, the lead units moving out of the range of their supporting artillery. On the evening of 25 November the Chinese attacked them. Over the next 24 hours the US 2nd Infantry Division lost over 4,000 troops and "most of its artillery."<sup>3</sup> Many other units in Eighth Army experienced similar attacks. By the evening of Sunday, 26 November, LTG Almond learned that Eighth Army had suffered a stunning defeat and was in full retreat. Also on 26 November, X Corps became aware that there were three Chinese divisions that were already south of the Marines' westernmost units at Yudam-ni.<sup>4</sup> The Marines and the 31st RCT were attacked the next evening. The 31st RCT did not receive any information that the Chinese had gone on the offensive.

### Tactical Intelligence

At the time of the Chinese attack, the RCT commander, COL MacLean, had sent the regimental reconnaissance platoon farther up the valley to investigate reports that there were 500 Chinese in the area.<sup>5</sup> The platoon never returned. The Chinese attacked and cut off the RCT before COL MacLean was able to determine what had happened to it. It is known that 1/32 IN did send out foot patrols in all directions when they established their perimeter on the afternoon of 27 November, a few hours before the Chinese attacked. It cannot be determined how far these patrols went, but they did not go far enough to detect the bivouac locations of the Chinese forces in the area. Based on the Chinese operations in the vicinity of the Marines at Hagaru-ri and Koto-ri, we know that the Chinese would establish a zone of separation from the US forces that they planned to attack. They would then wait until darkness to begin their move. They would then attack two to three hours after dark after reaching the U.S. positions. It is possible that if the 31st RCT had been more aggressive in its intelligence gathering that they might have discovered the bivouac locations of the Chinese before they attacked and surprised the RCT. Some of the reasons why they did not do that are discussed in the next chapter.

### Invalidating Intelligence Assumptions

The success of the initial Chinese attacks during the period 25 October to 2 November and their subsequent attacks starting on 25 November against Eighth Army and on 27 November against X Corps is known as one of the greatest intelligence failures in modern warfare. What is most remarkable about the nature of this intelligence failure is that the Chinese were able to pull off a successful surprise attack twice in a single 30-day period using nearly identical tactics – drawing the UN forces into lengthy road-bound

columns and then infiltrating forces through the mountains during the night and cutting the units off. The difference is that the first time truly was a surprise. The second surprise was a willful desire or belief that the Chinese could not do it a second time.

Fundamentally, intelligence is not only about what we know about where the enemy is and what he is doing, but about evaluating the enemy's capabilities. LTG Almond's stated perception that the Chinese were just a bunch of "Chinese laundrymen" is a key indication of his planning assumptions in his Intelligence Preparation of the Battlefield (IPB). His natural traits of aggressiveness, coupled with his contempt for the martial abilities of the Chinese, despite their demonstrated success against Eighth Army, led him to emphasize speed and tempo of operations at the expense of security.

The US Army FM 3-90, *Tactics*, dated July 2001, discusses how it is usually better to "err on the side of speed, audacity and momentum than on the side of caution." It defines a *calculated risk* as "an operation in which success is not a certainty, but which, in case of failure, leaves sufficient forces to cope with whatever situations arise." A "*military gamble* on the other hand can lead to either victory or to complete destruction of one's force." <sup>6</sup> In discounting the threat posed by the Chinese army despite its continuing successes, LTG Almond failed to show sufficient caution to prevent the complete destruction of part of his forces.

In a military campaign it is impossible to obtain complete and accurate information about the enemy. Thus the role of intelligence is to take the information that is available, analyze it, understand what the enemy's capabilities are, and make assumptions to cover the gaps in what is known about the enemy. The leader then uses this intelligence to plan his own operations to defeat the enemy. In LTG Almond's case,



his planning assumption with regard to intelligence was that the enemy was either in a retrograde movement away from him or at most on the defensive in his area of operations. This explains his orders to attack the enemy. He did not effectively calculate the risk to his forces if the enemy was preparing to attack him. His dispersal of the 7th Infantry Division and the tactical disposition of the 31st RCT by its leaders was a *military gamble* that could have led to victory but led instead to the destruction of the 31st RCT.

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<sup>1</sup>Eighth Army Command Report, 1 November–20 November 1950, Clay and Joan Blair Collection, Forgotten War, USAMHI, Carlisle, PA, 3, 6. The original document can be found at the National Archives R.G. 407, Box 1122.

<sup>2</sup>William R. Lynch, letter to Roy E. Appleman, 19 December 1976, Box 8, Correspondence with survivors, Appleman Collection, USAMHI, Carlisle, PA, 2.

<sup>3</sup>Martin Russ, *Breakout: The Chosin Reservoir Campaign, Korea, 1950* (New York: Fromm International, 1999), 84.

<sup>4</sup>Roy E. Appleman, *East of Chosin; Entrapment and Breakout in Korea, 1950*. (College Station, TX: Texas A&M University Press, 1987), 37.

<sup>5</sup>Roy E. Appleman, Letter to Ivan H. Long, 26 March 1979, Box 8, Correspondence with survivors, Appleman Collection, USAMHI, Carlisle, PA.

<sup>6</sup>US Army, FM 3-90, *Tactics* (Washington, DC: HQ DA, July 2001), 1-10; and US Army FM 6.0, *Mission Command: Command and Control of Army Forces*, August 2003, 2-79. Both discuss the distinction between calculated risks and military gambles in more detail.

## CHAPTER 4

### MOVING INTO THE TRAP, CHINESE ATTACK 27-29 NOVEMBER 1950

The same X Corps Operation Order no. 8 issued on 21 November 1950 that directed the 1st Marine Division to attack westward from Chosin Reservoir, directed that 7th Infantry Division relieve the Marine units east of the reservoir and continue the attack to the Yalu River. MG Barr, the 7th Infantry Division commander, protested that he could not support this mission. His units were already spread widely over the east side of Korea moving north to the Yalu River. Any forces that he sent to Chosin would be even farther away and he would not be able to support them in the event of a Chinese attack. LTG Almond basically told him that he had to do it. General Barr did not really have any option but to comply.

#### 1/32 IN Moves to the Reservoir

The 1/32 IN Battalion was the closest 7th Infantry Division unit to Chosin at the time the decision was made to replace the Marines east of the reservoir with Army troops. On 23 November, 1/32 IN Battalion received orders to move from a position southwest of Hamhung to the vicinity of Pukchong, about 160 road miles.<sup>1</sup> LTC Faith, the battalion commander, left early on 24 November to go to 32nd Regiment's headquarters as the battalion had been out of contact for 3 days.<sup>2</sup> He left the battalion movement in the charge of the battalion Executive Officer (XO), MAJ Miller. The unit was actually already on route to Pukchong when the unit was stopped on the road in the vicinity of the city of Hamhung by X Corps. MAJ Miller was ordered to report to Corps Headquarters to receive his orders. At X Corps headquarters, MAJ Miller received instructions to "move

to the area of the 5th Marine Regiment on the east side of the Chosin Reservoir and await the arrival of other 7th Infantry Division units.”<sup>3</sup> While the unit was waiting for MAJ Miller to return with their new orders, the battalion heard General MacArthur’s speech that the Eighth Army had launched the final offensive of the war. According to the survivors of the battalion, the word was spread about the battalion that some US units would be redeploying before Christmas.<sup>4</sup> This attitude that the war was almost over created a relatively lax attitude among the soldiers of the battalion that would be a contributing factor in the impending disaster. This attitude was only abetted by the fact that this battalion had up to this point only experienced fighting a defeated and withdrawing North Korean army at Seoul.

When LTC Faith arrived at Pukchong, he was told of the change in orders and returned to link up with his unit, arriving at the unit’s location at the entrance to the pass leading up to the reservoir at about 0030 on 25 November.<sup>5</sup> Thus LTC Faith had been on the road from early on the morning of 24 November to after midnight on the morning of 25 November (over 18 hours). The weather was extremely cold and the soldiers had difficulty sleeping, and had to move about to keep warm. Given that LTC Faith left the next morning at about 0600 with the Operations Officer, Operations Sergeant and Sergeant Major to recon the route up the pass, it is unlikely that he had more than four to five hours of sleep if that.

By the evening of 25 November, the 1/32 IN Battalion had reached an assembly area just south of hill 1221 behind the positions of the 5th Marines. This was almost the same position where the breakout attempt would meet its end six days later. The battalion spent the 26th doing maintenance, preparing shelters, and replenishing their fuel and

other supplies.<sup>6</sup> During the morning the Assistant Division Commander of the 7th Division, Brigadier General Hodes arrived at 1/32 IN Battalion's location. He flew into Hagaru-Ri at the south end of the reservoir and then was driven up the five miles to hill 1221 in a jeep. He told LTC Faith that 3/31 IN Battalion, the 31st Regiment Heavy Mortar Company, and the 57th Field Artillery Battalion (-one battery) were headed to join them on the east side of the reservoir. He also said that COL MacLean of the 31st Regiment would be arriving to take command of the newly constituted 31st Regimental Combat Team (RCT). He would also be bringing with him the 31st Regiment's tank company, medical detachment, headquarters detachment and signal detachment.<sup>7</sup>

At this point LTC Faith told General Hodes that he would be able to attack north before the arrival of the other elements of the 7th Infantry Division, provided he could obtain artillery support from the Marines and the support of a tank platoon. General Hodes disapproved of this plan and departed LTC Faith's command post.<sup>8</sup> After the general departed, LTC Faith went with his S-2, S-3, company commanders and platoon leaders and conducted a "detailed reconnaissance" of the most forward Marine positions. The most significant assessment of the Marine's positions was that it was on low ground, and was a much smaller and tighter perimeter than that used by the 1/32 IN Battalion's current standing operating procedures.<sup>9</sup>

At about 1800, 26 November, LTC Faith received a copy of the 1st Marine Division order which ordered the withdrawal of the 5th Marines from the east side of the reservoir to reinforce the 1st Marine Division's attack to the west of the reservoir. Colonel Murray, the 5th Marines' regimental commander, recommended to LTC Faith that he not head any further north until the arrival of the additional units of 7th ID.<sup>10</sup> COL

MacLean arrived at 1/32 IN Battalion's headquarters about an hour later. He said that he planned to attack north once the RCT had arrived in the area. LTC Faith immediately asked to move his battalion to the forwardmost positions being vacated by the 5th Marines the next day. This plan was approved by COL MacLean.<sup>11</sup>

Roy Appleman, in his book *East of Chosin*, as well as other writers and survivors of the 31st RCT have identified this as the first critical mistake that led to the destruction of the 31st RCT.<sup>12</sup> There are two key parts to this decision. The first part is that LTC Faith persisted in requesting to move to these forward positions north of the P'ungnyuri Inlet before the rest of the 31st RCT arrived despite the disapproval of General Hodes and the negative recommendation from COL Murray of the Marines (who had been there a few days and knew the terrain in the area east of the reservoir). It is quite possible that LTC Faith was eager to have the honor of leading the attack of the RCT north.<sup>13</sup> The second part is that COL MacLean approved of this move before first reconnoitering the ground for himself and before he was aware of enemy intentions in the area. This whole incident is indicative of the confusion reigning in the planning of the 31st RCT. COL MacLean was already planning on sending a single infantry battalion forward of the strong defensive position at hill 1221 before the rest of his artillery, armor, medical assets, and anti-aircraft units had arrived. This decision was predicated upon the fact that COL MacLean did not expect significant, if any, contact with the Chinese. The other result of abandoning the positions on hill 1221 is that when the Chinese seized it on the evening of 27 November (Figure 2, Changjin is an alternate spelling of Chosin), the two infantry battalions and the artillery battalion (1/32 IN and 3/31 IN, and 57 FA) were cut

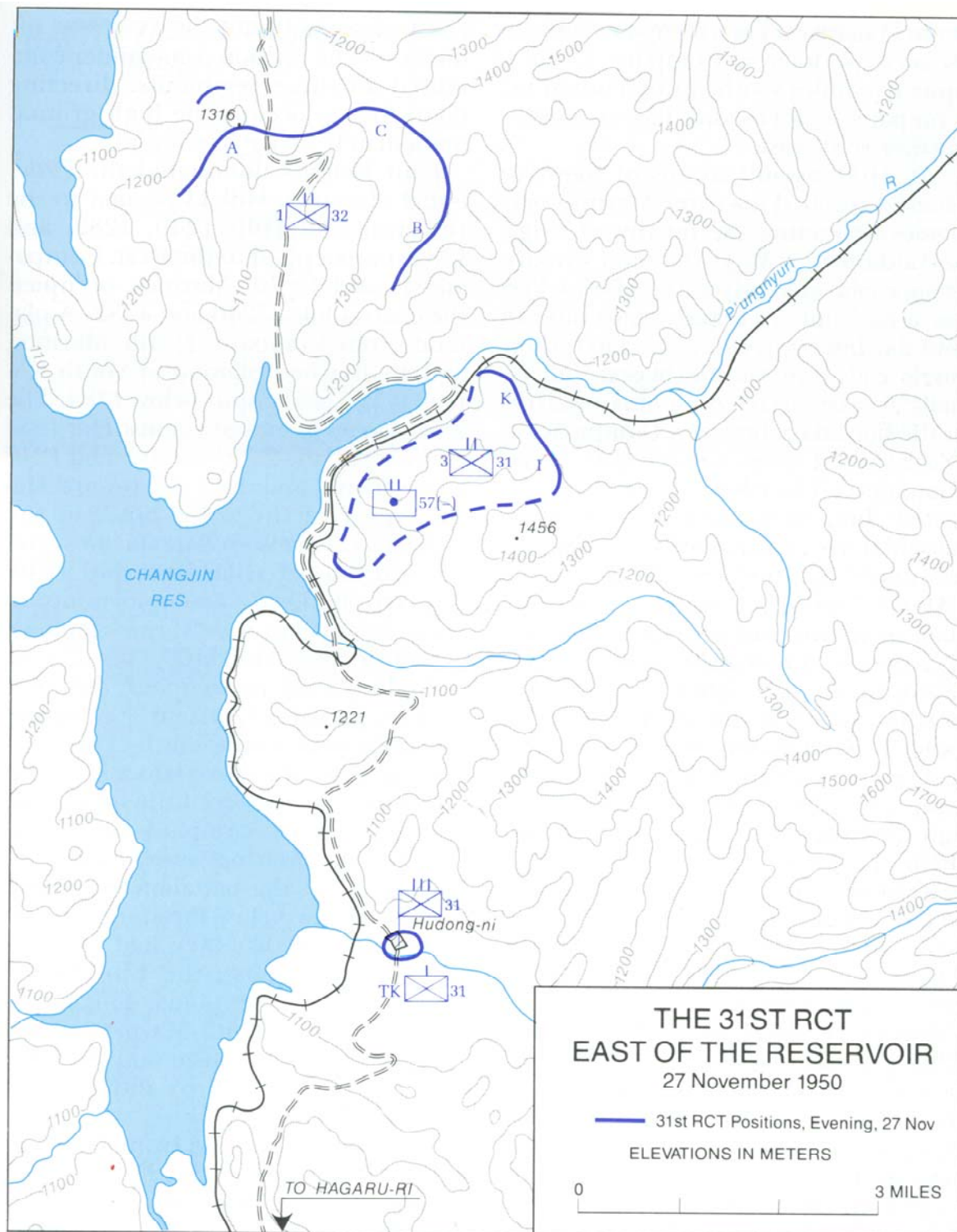


Figure 2. Situation Evening 27 November 1950

Source: Billy C. Mossman, *Ebb and Flow, November 1950-July 1951* (United States Army in the Korean War), (Washington, D.C.: U.S. Government Printing Office, 1990), 91.

off from getting re-supply of ammunition and fuel from the 31st RCT supply dump on the other side of the hill at the village of Hudong-ni.

The next morning, Monday, 27 November 1950, 1/32 IN Battalion prepared to move to the forward locations being vacated by the Marines. The move started at 1300 and was completed about 1530, about an hour before darkness. The battalion did not complete registration of artillery and mortar fires until about 2030.<sup>14</sup> This unit move that took two and a half hours while unopposed and with bridges intact may have influenced LTC Faith's planning factors during the later breakout from the P'ungnyuri Inlet which was even closer to the positions on hill 1221.

#### The Remainder of 31st RCT Moves to the Chosin Reservoir

At about 2030 on 26 November, LTC Embree, the 57th Field Artillery (FA) Battalion Commander, arrived at the 1/32 IN Headquarters and reported that the rest of the Task Force, including 3/31 IN Battalion, his field artillery battalion (-) with two firing batteries, an attached 40mm anti-aircraft battery, and a tank company would arrive by dark on the next day (27 November). COL MacLean established his HQ about 1 mile south of the small Korean village of Twiggae, just south of the 1/32 IN positions on the slopes of hill 1221.<sup>15</sup>

CPT Drake, the commander of the tank company, describes the move on 27 November from the port to the Korean village of Hudong-ni just south east of hill 1221: "My company had spent the entire day crawling up the steep climb from sea level after our landing by LST near Hungnam."<sup>16</sup> COL MacLean had established an ammunition and fuel dump at Hudong-ni.<sup>17</sup> The tank company refueled at Hudong-ni while CPT Drake went forward by jeep to COL MacLean's command post. When he arrived there he

was told that COL MacLean had sent the RCT's intelligence and reconnaissance (I&R) platoon to the north and east to investigate reports of Chinese activity in the area. He was told by COL MacLean to go north and talk to LTC Faith.

When CPT Drake arrived at LTC Faith's position, LTC Faith discussed with him how his tank company could best support his defense. LTC Faith told him to come north to LTC Faith's position the next day (28 November) as he did not consider it safe to move at night. Faith said that the Marines he had replaced reported some "occasional distant sightings" of Chinese soldiers. If the Chinese had attacked LTC Faith's position 24 hours later, it is likely that CPT Drake's tanks would have been there to support him. Likewise, if LTC Faith had remained in his positions at hill 1221 on 27 November instead of moving five to seven km north, the tanks would have arrived there and been incorporated into the position's defenses that evening after they refueled in Hudong-ni. When CPT Drake arrived back at his unit's location at Hudong-ni he encountered the RCT's medical company heading north toward 3/31 IN and 1/32 IN's positions. As it was already late, he recommended that they stay with his tanks and move out in the morning. The medical detachment commander decided that he would continue on to the forward elements. The medical company was later ambushed on their way over hill 1221 on their way to 3/31 IN's position. Only the first sergeant made it back to the 31st RCT HQ the next day (other survivors made it to 3/31 IN battalion's position).<sup>18</sup>

CPT James P. McClymont was the commander of D Battery, 15th AAA AW SP Battalion that was attached to 57th FA Battalion. The battery was equipped with eight M19 self-propelled (tracked) vehicles carrying 40mm anti-aircraft guns (hereafter referred to as M19s) and four M16 half-tracks equipped with quad-50's (four 50-cal



machine guns).<sup>19</sup> These weapon systems were to play a key role in the defense of the 3/31 IN perimeter during the battle on the east side of the Chosin reservoir. CPT McClymont survived the battle (retired as a Major) and reflected on some of the aspects of the move up to the reservoir. He makes two key observations. The first was that resupply was not very organized. Thus when the unit traveled through Hagaru-ri on its way to its bivouac location with 57th FA Battalion on the evening of 27 November, it failed to refuel at the fuel dumps established by the Marines. He had planned on sending his warrant officer back there to pick up fuel the next day.<sup>20</sup> The Chinese attacked that night and cut off the road back to Hagaru-ri so this was not possible. His second comment was on the poor integration of the 57th FA's guns and his anti-aircraft guns with the defensive position of the 3/31 IN. The 57th FA (with B Battery, A Battery was in the 3/31 IN's position) and his unit were to the south of the 3/31 IN perimeter (not in the perimeter). The whole expectation was that this location was just a temporary bivouac, preparatory to moving out on the next day, 28 November.<sup>21</sup> According to CPT McClymont, when the AAA Battery arrived at the perimeter they were met by a marine major who was waiting for them. The major told him that his unit had sent patrols 10 miles out and had not detected any Chinese.<sup>22</sup>

The entire movement of 31st RCT can be characterized as an administrative move in which contact with the enemy was not expected or considered highly unlikely. 1/32 IN moved out impetuously and because they were the most northern unit, were a little more prepared for contact than the rest of the RCT. The units and their leadership had seen little if anything to confirm that the Chinese were about to unleash an offensive anywhere near them. 1/32 IN, 3/31 IN, 57th FA (-)(with attached AAA battery), and CPT Drake's

tank company had all driven from the vicinity of the port of Hungnam to the east side of the reservoir in a single day's drive without even so much as seeing a single Chinese soldier. COL MacLean, LTC Faith, LTC Embree (57th FA battalion commander), and CPT Drake had been driving their individual jeeps up and down the road from port to the northern most positions held by 1/32 IN without facing molestation by the Chinese at any time. When the attacks came that Monday evening, 27 November 1950, the Chinese had accomplished a complete and utter moral surprise. Moral surprise is achieved when "the enemy does not know you are coming," as opposed to a more common material surprise where the "enemy knows you are coming but can not do anything to stop you" (because you outmaneuvered him, for example).<sup>23</sup> In this case the moral surprise achieved by the Chinese was even more complete because the 31st RCT not only did not know that the Chinese were coming, they did not even know or discounted that there were Chinese anywhere near to them that could come in the first place. The units had just arrived separately and there was no overall plan and only limited coordination established between the units.<sup>24</sup>

#### The Chinese Attack Evening Monday 27 November

About 2215 on the 27th of November, the Chinese attacked the positions of the 1/32 IN (Figure 3, Changjin is an alternate spelling of Chosin). LTC Faith had positioned his battalion in a horseshoe shaped formation. A Company was positioned west of the road going north, with his other companies spread out on the east side of the road. His positions did not extend up to the ridgeline to the east and southeast of his position. At about 2030, the battalion received its orders from COL MacLean's headquarters to attack to the north in the morning. LTC Faith had issued his attack order and distributed much

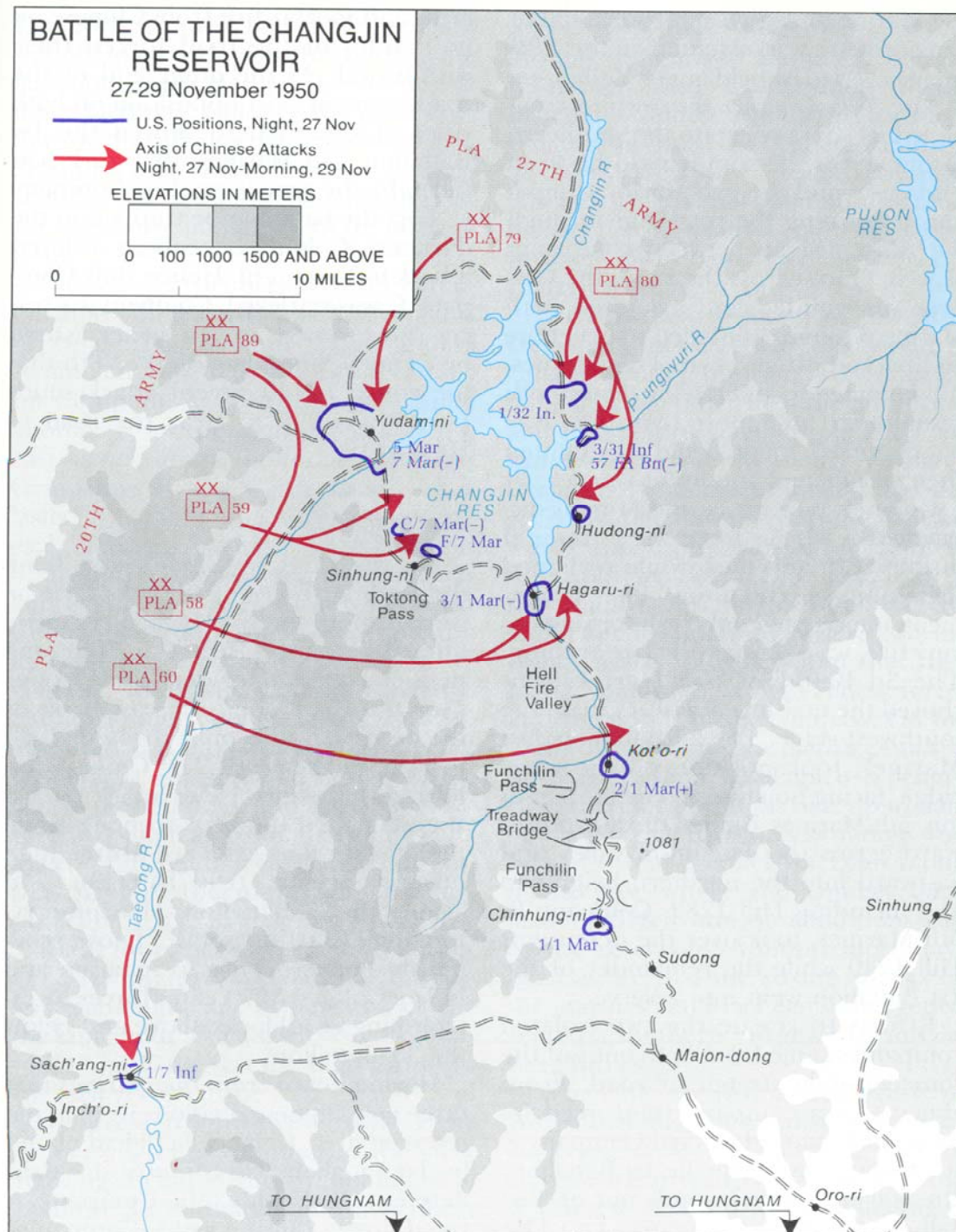


Figure 3. Chinese Attacks 27-29 November 1950.

Source: Billy C. Mossman, *Ebb and Flow, November 1950-July 1951* (United States Army in the Korean War), (Washington, D.C.: U.S. Government Printing Office, 1990) 95.

awaited mail to his company commanders at about 2130. When the Chinese attacked, the battalion staff mistook the scattered rifle fire around the perimeter as frightened firing by the South Korean KATUSAs. In actuality the Chinese had already infiltrated through the positions of the battalion and flanked the unit from the south west and south east where there were no defensive positions. Once the battalion realized that there were Chinese in the perimeter, they were able to fight them off with some success. Ominously, by around 0100, the battalion received reports from A Battery, located at 3/31 IN's position, that it was in heavy contact with the enemy and could not continue to provide fire support. One significant occurrence was the Chinese' use of a North Korean tank that came down the road from the North. It was successfully engaged and destroyed by one of the 1/32 IN recoilless rifle teams. This was the only known use of a tank in the entire battle against the 31st RCT at Chosin.<sup>25</sup> Unfortunately, 1/32 IN was not able to push the Chinese off the ridge to their east. About a hundred friendly casualties had already been processed through the battalion's aid station on the first night. The increasing numbers of wounded and the inability of the RCT to evacuate them would grow to be a significant problem for the 31st RCT.

The situation at the 3/31 IN perimeter was much worse. LTC Reilly had only established positions to the east facing up the valley with two infantry companies. The Chinese were able to infiltrate around his positions including over the ridgeline to his south and across the inlet and bridge to his north. The Chinese attacked around 0100. The Chinese were much more successful at infiltrating the battalion's positions than they had been at the 1/32 IN's location. They overran the battalion command post and killed or severely wounded all inside including LTC Reilly. They also overran the 81mm mortars

and A Battery's 105mm howitzers (although with the coming of daylight the 3/31 IN was able to recapture them intact).<sup>26</sup> The positions of the forward infantry companies and the A Battery of 57th FA were forced to pull back about 1000 yards in order to stabilize a defensive position against the Chinese onslaught.

The headquarters of 57th FA and B Battery along with CPT McClymont's AAA battery were located in a small valley or draw about a mile to the south west of the 3/31 IN's positions separated by a ridge line. They did not even hear the sounds of the furious firefight occurring at the 3/31 IN position. They did not even realize that the Chinese were in the area until they were in turn attacked early in the morning on the 28th. LTC Embree was also wounded on the morning of the 28th. He was able to order the withdrawal of the battalion into the inlet perimeter of the 3/31 IN.

The poor positioning of the perimeters of 1/32 IN, 3/31 IN and 57 FA battalions were exploited very effectively by the Chinese. Because their positions were only intended to be temporary bivouac positions preparatory to an attack to the north in the morning, the units of the 31st RCT were not in a position to meet a determined Chinese attack. At the end of the first night's fighting, the units had taken heavy casualties. The 1/32 IN and the RCT headquarters element were cut off from 3/31 IN and 57 FA's position at the inlet. In addition, the two battalions at the inlet were essentially leaderless in that they had lost both battalion commanders due to disabling wounds and the majors that took charge, MAJ Storm of 3/31 IN and MAJ Tolly of 57th FA were essentially there without orders.

### Tuesday 28 November 1950, the Day of Decision (Missed)

Early in the morning of 28 November, before daylight, the 31st RCT forward headquarters element located just south of 1/32 IN battalion's position received a radio report from 3/31 IN that both LTC Reilly and LTC Embree had become casualties and that they were still under heavy attack by the Chinese. They reported that A Battery's guns had been overrun and captured by the Chinese. Thus by daybreak on the morning of the 28th, the RCT's commander, COL MacLean was aware of the situation in both 1/32 IN and with the 3/31 IN and 57th FA at the inlet perimeter south of him. It is possible that COL MacLean misunderstood the true gravity and chaos of the situation at the perimeter. Perhaps he was distracted by the reports that the 3/31 IN battalion had recaptured A Battery's guns into believing that things were not as bad as they were. It is amazing that it was not until the afternoon of the 28th that COL MacLean attempted to move south to 3/31 IN's position. It was at this point that he realized that the Chinese had come up behind 1/32 IN and cut off their connection with 3/31 IN to the south.

On the morning of 28 November, COL MacLean had assessed that 1/32 IN had fared reasonably well against the Chinese during the night.<sup>27</sup> Early in the morning he returned to his 31st RCT advance command post where he would have learned about the reports that had been coming in there from 3/31 IN. He was not yet aware that the Chinese had come between his CP and 3/31 IN's position to the south. He was also unaware of the attacks on the 57th FA battalion, the ambush of the medical detachment and that the twenty-two tanks of CPT Drake's company were cut off from the rest of the RCT by the Chinese forces that had moved into the abandoned positions on hill 1221. He was also unaware of the whereabouts of the 2/31 IN battalion, which he assumed was on

its way to join the RCT. He had been led to believe by the X Corps staff that the battalion would arrive on the evening of 27 November or the next morning.<sup>28</sup> Although the unit had received its initial orders to move to Chosin to join the RCT on 27 November, it was not until the morning of 30 November that the battalion received trucks from X corps to join the unit. It was attacked by the Chinese before it got half-way up the pass and stopped. This battalion that COL MacLean had been promised would arrive no later than the morning of 28 November never arrived.

At this point on the morning of 28 November, the best thing that COL MacLean could have done was to order 1/32 IN to fight its way south to rejoin and consolidate at 3/31 IN's position immediately. This would have enabled him to ascertain for himself the true nature of the situation there and consolidate his force for future operations. 1/32 IN had not been able to push the Chinese off the ridge to their east, thus making their current position untenable. 1/32 IN was not even in a position to defend itself, never mind to conduct offensive operations. The battalion had expended a lot of its ammunition the night before and had over a hundred casualties. Being cut off from the south, they could not evacuate their casualties nor resupply their unit with fuel and ammunition. But as COL MacLean was not aware that the road south had been cut, and as he was expecting the imminent arrival of a fresh infantry battalion (2/31 IN) and CPT Drake's infantry company, it is quite understandable why he did not order a withdrawal of 1/32 IN on 28 November.

It was at this point that LTG Almond arrived at COL MacLean's forward HQ in a light helicopter from the Marine's base at Hagaru-ri at the south end of the reservoir. He drove up with COL MacLean to the 1/32 IN battalion's perimeter, arriving at about

1400.<sup>29</sup> In many ways this visit is one of the most bizarre and almost farcical episodes in the tragedy of the 31st RCT. In the midst of a quickly worsening situation, the appearance of the X Corps commander at the battalion command post of LTC Faith was a critical opportunity of leadership. COL MacLean had returned from his command post and he and LTC Faith briefed LTG Almond on the current situation. It is likely that COL MacLean put a positive face on the situation, based on his assessment that 1/32 IN could hold its current position until 2/31 IN and the tank company came up. LTG Almond told LTC Faith to retake the ridge to the east that C Company had lost during the night and had not been able to recover. He also told COL MacLean and LTC Faith that they must be facing elements of the Chinese units that X Corps had identified to be west of the reservoir. He was obviously not aware that there were actually elements of two Chinese divisions, the 80th division plus one regiment from another division, which were in the process of attacking the 31st RCT. LTG Almond was also not aware of the true state of affairs at the inlet perimeter of the 3/31 IN or that the road to Hagaru-ri, CPT Drake's tank company, and the 31st RCT main headquarters and supply dump had been cut by the Chinese.

This ignorance of the true state of affairs is clearly the reason for LTG Almond's orders to continue the offensive north. When he was told by LTC Faith that 1/32 IN had been attacked by elements of two Chinese divisions, LTG Almond exploded that "there weren't two Chinese divisions in all of Korea." LTG Almond attempted to encourage LTC Faith by dismissing the Chinese opposing him as a "remnants of a bunch of Chinese laundrymen fleeing north." From the accounts of the meeting that LTC Faith told his battalion staff, LTG Almond clearly did not understand the sheer ruthlessness with which



the Chinese had pressed forward their attacks on 1/32 IN's perimeter. LTC Faith knew the true nature of what his battalion had faced. It is likely that with COL MacLean putting a positive "spin" on things, that LTC Faith was not in a position to explain the true nature of the threat. It was not until later that evening (28 November) when LTG Almond flew to General MacArthur's Far East Command headquarters that LTG Almond realized the true threat that the Chinese posed to his corps.

Given their ignorance of the true situation of both the Chinese that they faced and the isolation of the various elements of the RCT, it is understandable that COL MacLean and LTG Almond did not realize the gravity of the RCT's situation. However, LTG Almond missed two significant opportunities for leadership here. First of all, it seems that he did not spend much time at the perimeter to find out what the situation was elsewhere in the perimeter. While it would not be in the purview of a corps commander to inspect a company perimeter, it would seem that if one was to make a visit to the front lines that one would get an assessment of the situation by talking to soldiers as well as the battalion and RCT commanders. The second point is that LTG Almond failed to appreciate LTC Faith's frustration with the position he was in. LTC Faith and 1/32 IN were not in any condition, physically or mentally to "continue their attack to the north" after receiving such an unexpected setback from the surprise attack of the Chinese. It is possible that LTG Almond had formed an assessment of LTC Faith as lacking aggressiveness (based on his assessment of him during the Han river crossing into Seoul a couple of months earlier) or being unduly shaken by virtue of his battalion suffering its first significant casualties of the war. Once again, one has to realize that LTG Almond's assumption was that the 2/31 IN and the tank company would be arriving shortly (by that evening) and the

RCT would only attack north on the next morning once it was consolidated. When General Almond ordered LTC Faith to take the high ground to the east of 1/32 IN, he should have realized that 1/32 IN had already tried and failed to accomplish this due to the numbers of Chinese defending it.

In addition to understanding the capabilities of the enemy, a commander must understand the capabilities of his own unit. On the morning of 28 November, 1/32 IN was not capable of continuing an attack north until their wounded could be evacuated and they could receive resupply of ammunition. Additionally, they could not attack north until the high ground to their east was secured; something they had already tried and failed to accomplish. It is the responsibility of a commander to not only know what needs to be done (securing the high ground along the route of march/MSR) but also the capability of the subordinate unit to accomplish it.

LTG Almond and COL MacLean's chief failure in this incident is in not grasping that the situation had changed. This failure was the second critical missed opportunity where organizational level leadership impacted the ultimate fate of the 31st RCT (the first critical one was the abandonment of the strong position on hill 1221 on 27 November). The fact that three of the battalion perimeters from this RCT had been overrun the previous evening (he knew at least of 1/32 IN and 3/31 IN) in determined Chinese attacks of at least battalion size should have made this abundantly clear. The fact that COL MacLean did not have positive information about the whereabouts of the 57th FA battalion, the tank company, and 2/31 IN (because COL MacLean was out of contact with those units) should have given him pause. Later in the war, LTG Almond would relieve battalion commanders if they moved out of range of their supporting artillery/were out of

contact with it (in this case 1/32 IN was in contact with their supporting artillery in 57th FA battalion). Perhaps this is one of the lessons that he took away from the Chosin reservoir. He thought very highly of COL MacLean and might have pressed the issue of COL MacLean not knowing where his units were if he had had doubts about his ability.

Again it is quite possible that he received very cursory and positive sounding information from COL MacLean in the short time he was at 1/32 IN's command post. In any case, from his activities in the short time at 1/32 IN's location, it appears that his main purpose in visiting there was to show "presence" and to hand out some medals before darting off to his next location. It is important to remember also that in earlier encounters with the Chinese, especially by the 1st Marine Division in fighting through the 124th PLA division in their fight up the pass to the Chosin reservoir, the US superior artillery and close air support had enabled the US forces to dominate the Chinese forces. The key difference in this situation is that while LTG Almond was of the impression that his corps was on the attack, it was actually the Chinese that were attacking.

In this case, the situation faced by the 31st RCT was actually more like the situation faced by the 8th Cavalry regiment a month earlier (discussed in Chapter 2 above). In that situation the units to the south of the 8th Cavalry were unable to break through to the 8th Cavalry. The 8th Cavalry's battalions were eventually forced to abandon their wounded in their battalion aid station, abandon their heavy equipment and vehicles, and infiltrate over the mountains around the blocking positions established by the Chinese. This would prove to be nearly the identical fate of the 31st RCT. The Chinese had achieved moral surprise in their attack on the 1/32 IN. It would not be until that evening (28 November) and into the next day before that moral surprise registered

fully on the RCT commander and the X Corps commander (COL MacLean and LTG Almond).

The other extremely detrimental effect of LTG Almond's visit is that it created its own level of moral confusion as to what the right thing to do was. By virtue of his confident order to "continue the attack to the north in the morning," he took away a lot of COL MacLean's flexibility to focus on what was happening to his unit. Just as LTG Almond was "buying" General MacArthur's assessment that the Chinese were fleeing north, and dutifully ordering an attack northward with speed before the Chinese could regroup, LTG Almond was forcing this assessment onto his subordinates. When he so emphatically ordered an advance, he made it a lot harder for COL MacLean to realize that his unit was in trouble and needed to consolidate its combat power before continuing offensive operations. Even today it would be very hard for a battalion or brigade level commander to argue against the assessment of a tactical situation made by a lieutenant general or go against the orders of a superior two to three levels of command above him.

Brigadier General Hodes, the Assistant Division Commander of the 7th Infantry Division, was located at the 31st RCT's main command post at Hudong-ni with CPT Drake's tanks. When he heard from the 31st RCT's S-3, LTC Anderson, that LTG Almond had visited 1/32 IN battalion's forward location, he exploded with "Well what in the hell did he tell MacLean to do?"<sup>30</sup> This is just another example of the confusion created by LTG Almond's visit. During the course of 28 November CPT Drake attempted to break through the Chinese positions on hill 1221 to get to the 3/31 IN position only four miles up the road. Without infantry support his tanks were easy prey for the Chinese using captured American made anti-tank rockets, possibly from the ambush of the RCT's

medical company the night before. After losing 4 of his 16 tanks, and having to shoot Chinese soldiers off of the other tanks, CPT Drake pulled back the company to the 31st RCT main headquarters at Hudong-ni. General Hodes told him to attempt to break through the next day with infantry support. This incident is discussed in greater detail in Chapter Five.

#### Evening 28-29 November 1950, Situation Realized

COL MacLean and his forward headquarters (about 35 personnel) relocated to the 1/32 IN Battalion's location once they realized that the Chinese had cut off the route back to 3/31 IN (late afternoon of 28 November). As the Chinese started probing attacks which developed into full scale assaults on the perimeter of the 1/32 IN, COL MacLean realized that the position was untenable. It is probably at this moment when he realized the true scope of the situation facing his unit. He made the decision with LTC Faith at about 0200 to withdraw the battalion back to the inlet perimeter with 3/31 IN. 3/31 IN was also under heavy attack as the Chinese sought to finish off the battalion after their success the previous evening. The addition of the AAA weapons from CPT McClymont's battery greatly aided their defense efforts. The breakout from 1/32 IN perimeter back to the 3/31 IN and 57th FA's perimeter are covered in the next chapter. The key aspect here is that it is possible that if 1/32 IN had moved back to 3/31 IN's perimeter during the afternoon of the 28th, they would have greatly enhanced the defensive position there. Instead both battalions continued to try to defend large perimeters with less combat power, dwindling ammunition, and rising casualties. When the units did join up the following day, they had less combat power than the day before while the Chinese attacks increased in strength and intensity.

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<sup>1</sup>Curtis, Major Wesley J., *Operations of the First Battalion, 32nd Infantry Regiment, Seventh Infantry Division, in the Chosin Reservoir area of Korea during the Period 25 November – 2 December 1950. Personal Experience of the Battalion Operations Officer*, copy of manuscript written at U.S.M.A. West Point between September 1951-28 January 1953, Box 7, Appleman Collection, USAMHI, Carlisle, PA, 4.

<sup>2</sup>Ibid., 4.

<sup>3</sup>Ibid.

<sup>4</sup>Ibid., 5.

<sup>5</sup>Ibid.

<sup>6</sup>Ibid., 7.

<sup>7</sup>Ibid.

<sup>8</sup>Ibid.

<sup>9</sup>Ibid., 8.

<sup>10</sup>Ibid.

<sup>11</sup>Ibid.

<sup>12</sup>Appleman, *East of Chosin*, 23.

<sup>13</sup>James O. Mortrude, Letter to Merrill A. Needham, Jr. Ph.D., 14 November 1985, Box 7, Appleman Collection, USAMHI, Carlisle, PA, 3.

<sup>14</sup>Curtis, 9.

<sup>15</sup>Ibid., 8.

<sup>16</sup>Robert E. Drake, Letter to Roy E. Appleman 10 January 1977, Box 7, Appleman Collection, USAMHI, Carlisle, PA, 2.

<sup>17</sup>Appleman, *East of Chosin*, 30.

<sup>18</sup>Drake, 2.

<sup>19</sup>Appleman, *East of Chosin*, 27.

<sup>20</sup>James R. McClymont, Letter to Roy E. Appleman, 7 July 1980, Box 7, Appleman Collection, USAMHI, Carlisle, PA, 4.

<sup>21</sup>McClymont, 3.

<sup>22</sup>*Ibid.*, 3.

<sup>23</sup>Richard Simpkin, *Race to the Swift: Thoughts on Twenty-First Century Warfare*, (London Brassey's Defense Publishers, 1985), p. 82, quoted in James B. Hickey's article: "Surprise, Shock and Daring: The Future of Mobile, All-Arms Warfare." *The Land Warfare Papers*, No. 45, April 2004. Arlington, Virginia: Association of the United States Army, at [http://www.ausa.org/PDFdocs/LWP\\_45.pdf](http://www.ausa.org/PDFdocs/LWP_45.pdf), p. 16. Hickey has some examples of the differences between moral and material surprise.

<sup>24</sup>Robert E. Drake, Letter to Roy E. Appleman 17 December 1977, Box 7, Appleman Collection, USAMHI, Carlisle, PA, 2.

<sup>25</sup>Appleman, *East of Chosin*, 54.

<sup>26</sup>*Ibid.*, 89.

<sup>27</sup>*Ibid.*, 76.

<sup>28</sup>*Ibid.*, 128.

<sup>29</sup>Curtis, 12.

<sup>30</sup>William R. Lynch, Letter to Roy E. Appleman, 30 July 1980, Box 8, Appleman Collection, USAMHI, Carlisle, PA, 4.

## CHAPTER 5

### BREAKOUT, 29 NOVEMBER – 2 DECEMBER 1950

#### The First Breakout: 1/32 IN Fights Back to 3/31 IN and 57th FA's Position, 29 November

About 0200 on Tuesday, 29 November, faced with the increasing intensity of Chinese attacks, COL MacLean and LTC Faith had made the determination that 1/32 IN could not hold its current position and that the hoped for support from the tank company and 2/31 IN would not be arriving. The infantry companies continued to defend the perimeter while the rest of the battalion and the 31st RCT headquarters element of about 35 soldiers loaded up the wounded into the vehicles. By 0400 the unit had begun its breakout.<sup>1</sup> A company was detailed to provide flank security on the ridge to the east of the road. The Chinese had constructed a road block at the bridge going over the inlet to the 3/31 IN Battalion's position. C Company attacked the road block from the high ground while B Company attacked directly across the ice into the rear of the Chinese that were attacking 3/31 IN from the northwest.<sup>2</sup> Artillery from the 57th FA Battalion was directed effectively at the Chinese to the east of the roadblock.<sup>3</sup> The entire battalion was in the 3/31 IN's perimeter by about 1300. Thus it took about nine hours to complete this move of about five to six kilometers in the face of enemy opposition. This move had begun in the darkness so the Chinese were not aware that the battalion was preparing to move. There was no use of intermediate objectives or control measures. It was simply a "lunge" back to 3/31 IN's position. LTC Faith just reacted to the situation as it developed. When the convoy reached the bridge across the inlet that was covered by fire,



the unit just gunned the vehicles through it and most vehicles got through without being hit.

LTC Faith Consolidates TF at the Perimeter  
at P'ungnyuri Inlet, 29 November

COL MacLean had been mortally wounded and captured by the Chinese while crossing the ice trying to stop what he thought was 3/31 IN Battalion's soldiers firing on the 1/32 IN. Because LTC Embree of 57th FA battalion and LTC Reilly of 3/31 had been wounded, LTC Faith assumed command of the remaining units in the perimeter. LTC Faith had to quickly assess the status of the perimeter and integrate the 1/32 IN Battalion's units into the perimeter. LTC Faith decided to keep the units in a very small perimeter on the low ground rather than seizing the high ground because it would be too difficult to defend an "over-extended perimeter."<sup>4</sup> This was probably reasonable given the Chinese demonstrated ability over the last two nights of infiltrating between the U.S. positions. The downside was that the crowded perimeter was under Chinese observation from the high ground and was thus increasingly vulnerable to enemy mortar fire. Tactical air support from the Marines arrived in the area at about 1100 allowing LTC Faith to establish this perimeter. LTC Faith sent back an urgent request for ammo with the aircraft through his Marine Aircraft controller (Captain Stamford). By 1300 the last of the 1/32 IN's vehicles arrived in the perimeter.<sup>5</sup> During the afternoon a "litter-bearing helicopter made two trips into the area and carried out four badly wounded men" including LTC Embree and LTC Reilly. This helicopter had been sent by BG Hodes from the 1st Marine Division at Hagaru-ri. These two helicopter trips were an opportunity for BG Hodes and LTC Faith to communicate that was missed (This is discussed in more detail in the next

section about BG Hodes efforts to break through from the south). Shortly before dark a flight of six (C-82) cargo planes dropped bundles of ammunition and medical supplies by parachute, about a quarter of them falling into Chinese hands.

CPT Drake's Tanks attempt to Breakthrough to LTC Faith's  
Encircled Force, 28-29 November

Near the village of Hudong-ni, south of hill 1221, was the main headquarters of the 31st RCT, along with the service battery of the 57th FA Battalion, making a total of about 150 personnel. Including the 176 soldiers in CPT Drake's tank company, there were thus a total of about 325 soldiers at this location. BG Hodes, the assistant Division Commander of the 7th Infantry Division was with them. His first order was to CPT Drake to attempt to break through the Chinese and reinforce the rest of the RCT to the north.

CPT Drake's tank company began its attack early on the morning of 28 November, attempting to fight its way through the Chinese blocking position on hill 1221. About 1000 they encountered the destroyed vehicles of the 31st RCT's medical company. CPT Drake sent one platoon of tanks up the road, with one attempting to attack up the slope of the hill. He kept a third platoon in reserve, but later deployed them on the flat ground to the east of the road. The two lead tanks on the road were hit by American 3.5-inch rocket launchers (probably captured from the medical company the night before) and were destroyed. The platoon attempting to attack up the hill to the west of the road had great difficulty in maneuvering. The slope was too slippery and icy. One lost control on the steep slope of the hill and another threw a track.<sup>6</sup> Two of the tanks east of the road got stuck in the swampy ground and had to be pulled out. CPT Drake had to use his machine guns to kill the Chinese that were jumping on the tanks in front of him. By this

time, CPT Drake and BG Hodes, who had accompanied CPT Drake during the attack, realized that the attack was not going to succeed. CPT Drake told BG Hodes that he would try again the next day if he could get some infantry support. He also requested air support.

While the tank attack was in progress, the 31st RCT HQ at Hudong-ni received information that 2/31 IN would not be arriving and that the Chinese had cut the road through the pass from Koto-ri.<sup>7</sup> As they were out of radio contact with either 3/31 IN, 57th FA, 1/32 IN or COL MacLean's forward 31st RCT headquarters element, this critical information could not be forwarded to them. It is likely that it was not until two days later (30 November) that LTC Faith would find out from MG Barr that 2/31 IN battalion would not be coming to support the RCT. When BG Hodes returned to the command post he realized that there was nothing else that he could do at this location. He resolved to return to Hagaru-ri to see what assistance he could get from the 1st Marine Division. Because the road was possibly not secure, BG Hodes took one of CPT Drake's tanks. Once at Hagaru-ri, he could use the tank's radios to communicate back to the 31st RCT CP at Hudong-ni.

At Hagaru-ri, BG Hodes was able to coordinate with the Marines for air support to LTC Faith force, as well as to the tank attack of CPT Drake the next day (29 November). He coordinated with X Corps for aerial resupply drops to the units at the inlet and the 31st RCT HQ and Tank Company at Hudong-ni. BG Hodes was able to obtain the use of a Marine litter helicopter which he sent to the P'ungnyuri inlet. It was only able to make two trips on 29 November, picking up LTC Reilly and LTC Embree

and two other badly wounded soldiers before darkness fell (the first helicopter arrived at 1600). He was not able to secure its use on successive days.

On 29 November CPT Drake again attempted to break through the Chinese position on Hill 1221, this time with about 50-75 dismounted soldiers drawn from the headquarters and service companies. Once again his tanks could not go up the hill except on the road. He had no artillery support except for his one mortar. The air strike that he had requested from the Marines through BG Hodes the previous day was not controlled by CPT Drake as he did not have a Forward Air Controller (FAC). As a result the air strike hit the American as well as Chinese troops.<sup>8</sup> After about four hours CPT Drake was forced to withdraw after receiving heavy casualties (about 20 killed and a large number of wounded), although not losing any more tanks. This was the last attempt to break through to LTC Faith's TF from the south.

It is quite probable that LTC Faith was still assuming that a force was going to break through to him from the south (COL MacLean had been expecting the tank company and 2/31 IN to arrive on the 28th). One of the failures of leadership at this point (afternoon of 29 November) was that no one communicated to LTC Faith that he would need to breakout on his own and get back to Hagaru-ri on his own. BG Hodes must have known that CPT Drake's second day of attacks had failed. There was no plan for a branch or sequel of what needed to happen if attempts to breakthrough from the south failed. At this point, 31st RCT was still under the command of 7th Infantry Division. According to the X Corps instruction number 19, 1st Marine Division did not assume command of the RCT until 0800 on the 30 November. As MG Barr's representative, BG Hodes had the authority to order LTC Faith to attempt to breakout the next day (30 November). He

could have sent word on one of the two helicopter flights that he sent to the perimeter on the 29th (to pick up seriously wounded) or he could have flown in one of them to the perimeter to either take charge, explain/assess the situation, or other aspects of coordinating a break-out. It is likely MG Smith of the 1st Marine Division would not have opposed this proposed order as evidenced by the very same order issued to LTC Faith to break-out on his own on 1 December. This was the third missed opportunity for organizational leadership that might have tipped the balance of fate towards the 31st RCT being able to make a successful breakout.

### X Corps Orders Withdrawal

On the evening of 28 November, LTG Almond was summoned to Japan to General MacArthur's Far East Command. General MacArthur had realized that the Chinese were attacking in force. LTG Almond continued to insist that the 1st Marine Division and 7th Infantry Division were capable of continued offensive operations. Despite this, General MacArthur directed that he pull the X Corps back to the city of Hamhung and the port of Hungnam to be evacuated by sea. When General Almond returned to X Corps headquarters on the 29th he ordered a withdrawal of all forces to commence. This order also assigned the 31st RCT to the 1st Marine Division effective at 0800 on the next day, 30 November.

On the morning of 30 November, shortly before noon, MG Barr arrived at the inlet perimeter by helicopter to see LTC Faith. He went immediately to speak with LTC Faith for about 20 minutes and then departed. Not much is known about this conversation. LTC Faith did not tell his staff what MG Barr and he discussed.<sup>9</sup> LTC Faith did tell his staff that "General Hodes was forming a task force in Hagaru-ri

composed of a platoon of tanks and a composite platoon of riflemen to attempt to relieve the task force.”<sup>10</sup> Given that General Hodes had had CPT Drake’s tank company attempting to break through the Chinese positions at hill 1221 for two days without success, it is not clear why General Barr would have told him this. The next morning (1 December) when LTC Faith was discussing the breakout plan with his staff, he said that MG Barr had given him no instructions.<sup>11</sup> According to General Barr (in a speech given to CGSC about three months later in February 1951), LTC Faith had said that he “felt he would be able to fight his way out.”<sup>12</sup> General Barr states frankly that the situation was more serious than LTC Faith realized and implies that it was also more serious than he realized (he was relying upon LTC Faith’s assessment as the commander on the ground). This was despite the fact that General Hodes had briefed him that the LTC Faith’s force was in danger. MG Barr had had a short meeting with General Almond that morning at which Almond must have told him about the X Corps withdraw order. Before leaving Hagaru-ri Barr had also held a short meeting with the 1st Marine Division commander, MG Smith, who must have told him that he could not send reinforcements to try to break through to LTC Faith until after his 5th and 7th Marine Regiments had fought their way back to Hagaru-ri from Yudam-ni. It is amazing that MG Barr did not recommend a breakout at that moment given the length of time that would obviously be required before any attempt to break through to LTC Faith’s force could be made. Even if MG Barr had recommended a breakout to LTC Faith when they met on 30 November, it is likely that it could not have been executed until the next day at the same time it actually occurred. This was due to the time needed to prepare (3 hours) and given that the low cloud cover prevented the air support from arriving until after noon on 1 December.

LTC Faith thus probably based his assessment that his unit could successfully breakout on a number of factors. One source of hope was the slackening level of attacks on the evening of the 29th-30th which might have led him to believe that the Chinese attack had culminated. Another factor was that U.S. Air Force and Marine fighter-bombers had arrived with first light on the 30th and quickly done heavy damage to the Chinese enabling TF Faith to restore its perimeter. He was not aware until the next day that the weather on the morning of the 1st would be foggy and overcast in the morning. Finally, he had anticipated that 31st RCT headquarters and CPT Drake's company was still on the other side of hill 1221 attempting to break through to him. All three of these assumptions upon which LTC Faith most likely placed his hopes for a breakout proved to be unrealistic.

#### Replacing COL MacLean (MIA)

One of the questions regarding what happened to the 31st RCT is why MG Barr did not replace COL MacLean, possibly with BG Hodes who was already in the area, or another experienced colonel. One aspect that may shed light on this is that it is not known at what point MG Barr became that COL MacLean was missing. It is likely that the earliest that he or BG Hodes could have known anything was late on the afternoon of the 29th when the helicopters returned to Hagaru-ri with LTC Reilly and LTC Embree. At this point it was already getting too dark to send the helicopter back with BG Hodes, even if Hodes had decided to go on his own initiative to take command. BG Hodes was not able to get access to the helicopter from the Marines the next day, although MG Barr was able to get it late that morning (30 November) to fly to LTC Faith's location. Even if BG Hodes had informed MG Barr that COL MacLean was missing on the evening of the

29th, MG Barr would still have to have identified, located and informed a colonel and got him flown to Hagaru-ri sometime on the 30th. He would have then had to obtain a helicopter to take him to the inlet most likely right before nightfall. Alternatively, MG Barr could have sent BG Hodes to take command of the Task Force on the 30th. Roy Appleman in his book, *East of Chosin*, says that MG Barr learned that COL MacLean was missing from LTC Faith when he flew into the perimeter before noon on the 30th of November.<sup>13</sup> By this time, the 31st RCT had been placed under the command of the 1st Marine Division and MG Barr had no formal tactical authority over it.

As with any command decision, there are both benefits and drawbacks to bringing in a new commander, in this case to replace LTC Faith as the leader of the task force encircled by the Chinese. It is quite possible that a freshly rested individual could have thought out a better withdrawal plan than that planned by LTC Faith (discussed later in the chapter). He could have left LTC Faith in charge of the perimeter defense for the night. He would not have been able to bring a regimental staff with him, so he would have had to use the same ad hoc staff relationships that LTC Faith had established upon reaching the perimeter with the 3/31 IN and 57th FA. On the other hand, there are quite a few potential drawbacks to replacing LTC Faith. The first is that the new leader would be unfamiliar with the situation of the encircled battalions or the capabilities and tactics of the Chinese. He would probably have wasted much valuable time trying to determine this before even beginning to plan a breakout. The second thing is that the units in the perimeter already had considerable trust and faith in LTC Faith as he had led his battalion through three nights of Chinese attacks. The other two battalions, commanded by majors, had seen his battalion come to the rescue of their beleaguered units the morning before



and how he had reorganized and re-energized the defense of the perimeter. MG Barr knew LTC Faith well from their time in the China observation mission and probably held him in high esteem. It is also likely that MG Barr underestimated the fatigue of LTC Faith whose mental efforts had been focused on the survival of his unit. As far as sending BG Hodes to replace LTC Faith as the TF commander, MG Barr may have felt that the situation was not dangerous enough to require BG Hodes to take charge or he may have considered it too dangerous to risk sending additional personnel, especially someone like BG Hodes who was so important to the Division as a whole. While General Barr has said that LTC Faith underestimated the Chinese between his position and Hagaru-ri and this led to his defeat, MG Barr and BG Hodes also underestimated the capability of the Chinese force to stop LTC Faith from making the breakout. Given the situation (numbers of wounded, lack of ammunition, strength of enemy, weather, and condition of the troops/loss of key leaders) it is quite likely that, even with a new commander, LTC Faith's task force would have met the same end.

X Corps Generals Conference, Hagaru-ri, 1400 30 November

MG Barr returned to Hagaru-ri to a X Corps commander's conference with LTG Almond at 1400. LTG Almond had ordered the 1st Marine Division to withdraw one of their regiments from Yudam-ni to relieve the 31st RCT.<sup>14</sup> LTG Almond directed that General Barr and Smith "submit a plan for the withdrawal" of the 31st RCT. LTG Almond was incensed that 2/31 IN had not yet arrived and directed that they join the Marines at Koto-ri immediately. MG Smith wrote in his diary that LTG Almond made a comment that he would have LTC Faith relieved if he didn't attack out of the encirclement back to Hagaru-ri (like the two Marine Regiments on the west side of the

reservoir were doing). After the conference, MG Barr and MG Smith discussed that nothing could be done to help Faith with the small number of units at Hagaru-ri. General Smith told MG Barr that Marine Air would be allocated to LTC Faith the next day on a preferential basis to help him breakout back to Hagaru-ri. General Smith directed that BG Hodes prepare an order to LTC Faith to conduct a breakout the next day, but without risking the safety of his wounded.<sup>15</sup> LTC Faith did not receive this order until a couple of hours after he had already begun his breakout the next day. Once again, failure to communicate with LTC Faith's force prevented him from getting the most current information. Even if he had received this information at nightfall on 30 November, it would have given him and his staff an additional 18 hours to plan their break-out (albeit in the midst of ongoing Chinese attacks on the evening of 30 November).

By this time it was apparent to all that the position of Hagaru-ri at the south end of the reservoir was critical. The two Marine Regiments isolated on the west side of the reservoir and the 31st RCT on the east side of the reservoir would all have to go through this point before fighting their way through the Funchilin Pass to the port of Hungnam. In addition the engineers were frantically building an airstrip at Hagaru-ri to be able to bring in supplies by air and evacuate the many wounded (thousands). On the 30th, the Marine battalion commander only had two infantry companies to defend the entire area, with its air strip, Marine Division command post and stockpiled supplies, fuel and ammunition. The decision was made, probably by consultation between MG Smith and MG Barr, to pull the remaining units between Hagaru-ri and LTC Faith's task force back to reinforce the perimeter at Hagaru-ri. Thus on the afternoon of the 30th, CPT Drake's tank company, the 31st RCT HQ and service units, and the Marine A Engineer Company just

south of the 31st RCT (within sight of Hagaru-ri) pulled back to Hagaru-ri into positions on the “East Hill” of the Marines defensive perimeter just before dark. A few hours after they arrived, the Chinese attacked the East Hill in strength. Had CPT Drake’s tanks not been there, it is quite possible that Hagaru-ri might not have been there when the two Marine Regiments and the remnants of the 31st RCT arrived there. In any event, CPT Drake was running low on ammunition based on his attacks during the previous two days. The Chinese were also threatening to destroy the only bridge capable of supporting his tanks between the position at Hudong-ni back to Hagaru-ri. However, with the withdrawal of these units, they would not be there the next day to assist LTC Faith’s task force when they reached the area late on 1 December.

#### LTC Faith Decides on a Break-out

LTC Faith’s unit expected a relief column to reach them during the day (30 November). By the afternoon of the 30th it was obvious that “a relief column would not reach them that day.” The Chinese continued their attack in the afternoon, deviating from their usual tactic of attacking at night.<sup>16</sup> During the late afternoon LTC Faith and his staff developed a highly detailed plan to counter-attack any penetrations of the perimeter.<sup>17</sup>

The Chinese had brought up two more regiments to attack LTC Faith’s force during 29-30 November. The Chinese attack on the evening of 30 November-1 December was decidedly more savage and determined than it had been on the preceding two nights as it seemed that they were determined to destroy the perimeter.<sup>18</sup> The attacks increased in intensity after midnight. At about 0300 a part of the perimeter was overrun. LTC Faith’s counter-attack force (D Company) was able to contain the penetration but was not able to restore the original perimeter. With the coming of dawn the Chinese

attacks subsided. By this time, the remaining soldiers under LTC Faith's command were getting more and more desperate. They had been fighting for over 80 hours in below zero weather. Few had had much sleep or much to eat (food frozen). Dead and wounded soldiers were everywhere and wounded soldiers who could not move froze to death. The unit did not have warming tents. Ammunition was short, with only a few rounds remaining for the artillery. The weather was overcast with low visibility negating the use of air power to support them. Around 1000 hours a single Marine fighter-bomber flew down low and reported that there would be a break in the weather by noon and that he would bring back air support.<sup>19</sup> He also reported that there were no friendly forces between LTC Faith forces and Hagaru-ri.

It was at this point that LTC Faith, after discussing the situation with his staff, decided to attempt a breakout. He told his staff that "he had decided this on his own initiative and without any help or direction from any higher headquarters."<sup>20</sup> He characterized the breakout effort as a single dash that would attempt to make it from the current position to Hagaru-ri in one movement. He ordered that only the trucks to carry the wounded would be brought (about 25). He ordered the artillery and heavy mortars to expend all their ammunition by 1300 and destroy their weapons (they only had a few rounds of artillery ammunition remaining). The remaining anti-aircraft weapons tracks were designated to protect the front and rear of the column. Jeeps with machine guns were interspersed within the column. C Company of 1/32 IN would lead the break-out (the same company that had so successfully attacked the Chinese blocking position in the original move of 1/32 IN back to 3/31 IN's perimeter. Likewise, A Company would again

provide security on the high ground on the left flank of the break-out. The remnants of 3/31 IN would provide the rear guard.

LTC Faith did not include plans for intermediate objectives, phase lines, or other coordination measures between his units. It may be that because he had not commanded a regimental size unit before in such a complex operation, he was not as familiar with these things as he should have been. It is quite likely that because he had not had formal schooling, such as attending Command and General Staff College, he did not have a base of knowledge to fall back upon when his personal experience was lacking.<sup>21</sup> However, even if LTC Faith and his staff had planned for these kinds of things, it is possible that the subordinate units would still have had difficulties executing them given the fierce resistance of the enemy and the utter exhaustion of the subordinate leaders that affected their ability to comprehend even the simple plan that LTC Faith prepared for the breakout.

The Chinese on the high ground could see that LTC Faith's force was preparing to breakout and increased their volume of direct and indirect fire (Figure 4, Changjin is an alternate spelling of Chosin). As promised, the Marine aircraft arrived at noon and began hitting the Chinese positions in front of the breakout. One napalm bomb fell short and engulfed A Company killing several soldiers horribly. This fratricide was devastating to unit cohesion. Some authors and survivors have identified this event as the beginning of the end of the organizational integrity of the RCT. However the aerial attacks were even more intensely effective against the Chinese. They inflicted horrific casualties on the Chinese and the column began to move forward. Many of the survivors have commented

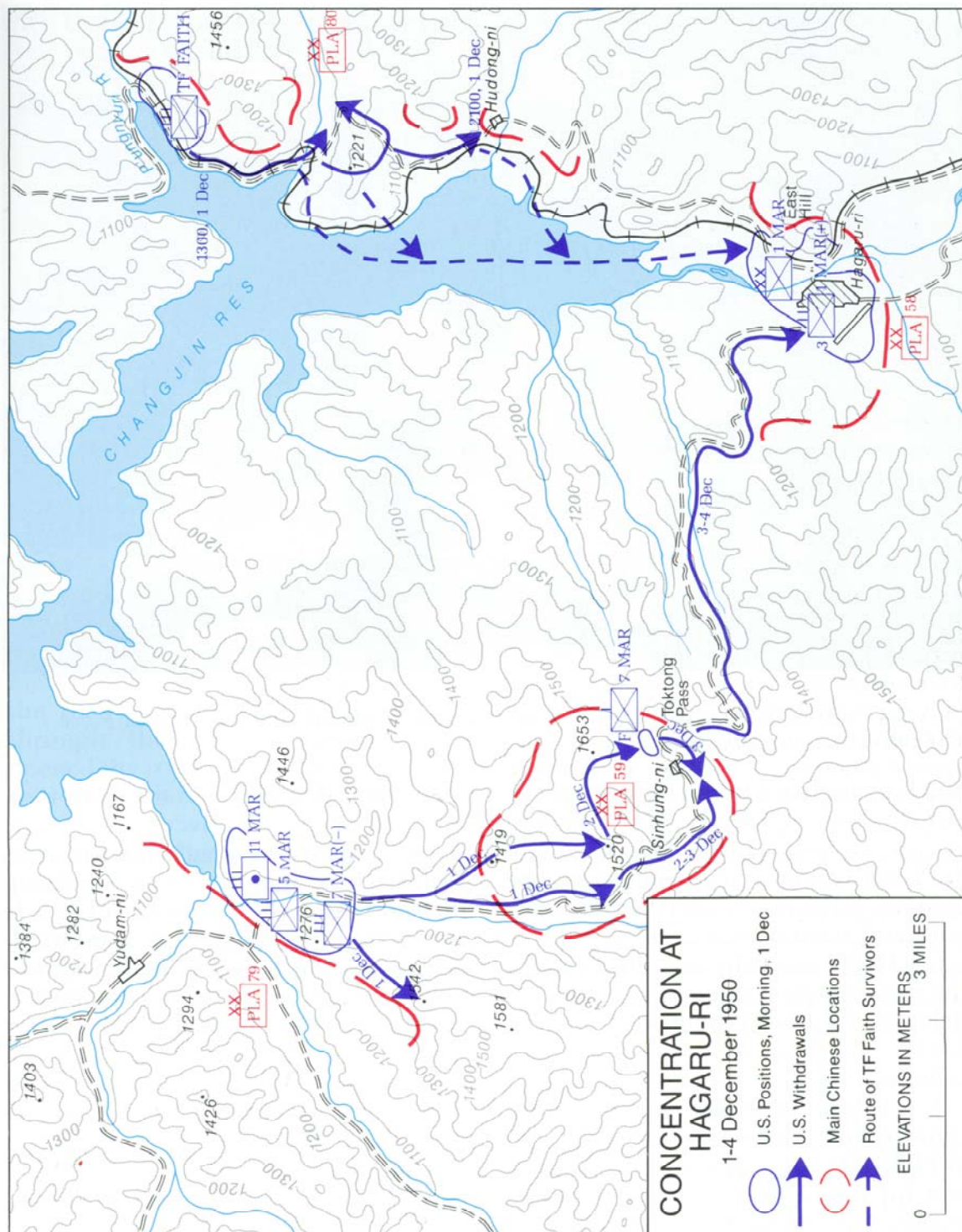


Figure 4. Breakout and Destruction of 31st RCT.

Source: Billy C. Mossman, *Ebb and Flow, November 1950-July 1951* (United States Army in the Korean War), (Washington, DC U.S. Government Printing Office, 1990), 132.

that the effectiveness of the air support was crucial to the RCT getting as far as it did and in enabling the numbers of personnel who did survive. After moving about a mile, the column was stopped short at a blown-out bridge. It took about two hours to move the column around this as many vehicles had to be towed up the steep embankment. By about 1500 the column got going again. Around 1530 it reached the second blown bridge below hill 1221. LTC Faith had to personally lead the attempt to destroy the roadblock and was mortally wounded in the attack. By this time darkness had descended and a light snow began falling. The remainder of the 31st RCT splintered into small groups of men isolated by the darkness and snow.<sup>22</sup> Running out of ammunition and unable to communicate with any kind of organization, these small groups of men made their way individually and in groups to the Marine lines at Hagaru-ri, many moving across the frozen Chosin Reservoir. At this point, the 31st RCT ceased to exist as a unit.

#### Analysis of the Breakout

When it is considered that LTC Faith had told MG Barr that he thought he could conduct a successful breakout from the inlet perimeter before noon on 30 November, it is remarkable that he and his staff did not begin planning for such an event until 1000 the next day. No doubt his task force was busy with collecting and treating the wounded and reorganizing after the combat of the evening before. Likewise, coordinating the ongoing air support, the restoration of the perimeter, and other ongoing operations within the perimeter consumed what mental energy LTC Faith and the other key organizational level leaders had remaining at this point. Some accounts have LTC Faith visiting the wounded at this time and pleading for those still able to fire a weapon to return to the front line.

The other factor that is inexplicable is why LTC Faith did not coordinate a breakout attempt with MG Barr. It is likely that it was not until MG Barr arrived that LTC Faith had seriously considered that he might have to conduct a breakout. Up to that point he had been in almost complete isolation from any higher unit. It seems that up to that point LTC Faith had assumed that other forces such as 2/31 IN battalion or other Marine units were in the process of conducting a break through to him. Even more amazing is that MG Barr did not coordinate a breakout attempt with LTC Faith right at that moment. MG Barr knew the true extent of the situation and only he, not LTC Faith, was in a position to coordinate anything. As 31st RCT now fell under the command authority of 1st Marine Division, and as MG Barr had no other 7th Infantry Division units with which to support LTC Faith, MG Barr appears to have washed his hands of any responsibility of what happened to LTC Faith's unit. There is evidence from 7th Infantry Division reports that MG Barr personally demanded and obtained high priority for air drops of supplies and ammo to LTC Faith's force. Realistically, perhaps that was all he had to offer given the dispersal of his division due to LTG Almond's orders.

With the benefit of hindsight, the breakout attempt should have been made on the morning of the 30th. By the evening of the 29th, it should have been obvious to BG Hodes that he was not going to be able to break through from the south. If he had ordered LTC Faith to attempt a breakout on his own on the morning of the 30th, then CPT Drake's Tank company and the 31st HQ units would have been at Hudong-ni and able to support LTC Faith. LTC Faith and his staff could have planned the breakout during the night and started preparations in the early morning of 30 November without the Chinese realizing what they were planning to do. Additionally the relatively clear weather on 30



November, allowed the Marine and Air Force air to arrive shortly after daylight. This would have given LTC Faith's task force a whole day of daylight to conduct their breakout, presumably under air support the entire time. If LTC Faith's task force been able to reach hill 1221 in the early afternoon when CPT Drake's Tank company and the 31<sup>st</sup> RCT HQ and service elements could have supported them from the south, they might have made it out with modest casualties. Once they were through hill 1221, the route from there would probably have been relatively clear as it was for the 31<sup>st</sup> RCT HQ when they returned back to Hagaru-ri on the afternoon of 30 November.

Unfortunately, LTC Faith's force did not begin its breakout when conditions were more favorable and the force had greater ability to generate combat power. One major problem on 1 December was the shortage of ammunition. By starting out on 30 November, they would have had all the ammunition they expended during the nearly 36 hours from the morning of 30 November until the time when they began their breakout attempt. At the time of the breakout, the KATUSAs who made up about one third of LTC Faith's task force were limited to one clip of five rounds each for self protection. If so much ammunition had not been expended in the previous 36 hours, it is possible that the KATUSAs would have fought more determinedly during the breakout (most of the accounts do not mention fighting by KATUSA's specifically). They would also have had more ammunition for their 105mm howitzers to provide fire support during the night after the air support was not available. Additionally, there would have been fewer wounded to bring out and the key leaders and soldiers who were lost on 30 November and the night of 30 November-1 December would still have been alive/not wounded. Finally, there would have been a greater supply of fuel. When preparing for the breakout

on 1 December, the M19 in the rear of the column could not start because the NCO in charge of it had turned off the engine to conserve fuel. If that weapon system had been available it is quite possible that 3/31 IN rear guard of the column would have been more successful than it was.

As it was, the breakout attempt made impressive progress against tremendous obstacles during the few hours of daylight available. However, as night fell, all unit cohesion was lost as soldiers became isolated from each other in the darkness and light snow. With little or no ammunition, the soldiers lost their will to stay as a unit and the survival instinct took over, abandoning the wounded in the truck convoy, and escaping over the ice.

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<sup>1</sup>Major Wesley J. Curtis, *Operations of the First Battalion, 32nd Infantry Regiment, Seventh Infantry Division, in the Chosin Reservoir area of Korea during the Period 25 November – 2 December 1950. Personal Experience of the Battalion Operations Officer*, copy of manuscript written at U.S.M.A., West Point, between September 1951 and 28 January 1953, Box 7, Appleman Collection, USAMHI, Carlisle, PA, 13.

<sup>2</sup>Curtis, 14.

<sup>3</sup>Appleman, *East of Chosin*, 109.

<sup>4</sup>Curtis, 14.

<sup>5</sup>Appleman, *East of Chosin*, 111.

<sup>6</sup>*Ibid.*, 85.

<sup>7</sup>*Ibid.*, 86.

<sup>8</sup>*Ibid.*, 127.

<sup>9</sup>Roy E. Appleman, Letter to Robert E. Jones, 12 January 1979, Box 8, Correspondence with survivors, Appleman Collection, USAMHI, Carlisle, PA.

<sup>10</sup>Curtis, 14.

<sup>11</sup>Robert E. Jones, Letter to Roy E. Appleman 8 February 1979, Box 7, Appleman Collection, USAMHI, Carlisle, PA, 2.

<sup>12</sup>David C. Barr, Transcript of address given by MG Barr before the Army War College, Fort Leavenworth, Kansas, 21 February 1951, USAMHI, Carlisle, PA, 22.

<sup>13</sup>Appleman, *East of Chosin*, 144.

<sup>14</sup>X Corps Instruction No. 19, Appleman, *East of Chosin*, 148.

<sup>15</sup>Appleman, *East of Chosin*, 150.

<sup>16</sup>*Ibid.*, 147.

<sup>17</sup>Curtis, 15.

<sup>18</sup>*Ibid.*, 16.

<sup>19</sup>*Ibid.*, 18.

<sup>20</sup>Jones, Letter to Roy E. Appleman 8 February 1979, Box 8, Correspondence with survivors, Appleman Collection, USAMHI, Carlisle, PA.

<sup>21</sup>James O. Mortrude, Letter to Merrill A. Needham, Jr. Ph.D. 23 March 1986, Box 7, Appleman Collection, USAMHI, Carlisle, PA.

<sup>22</sup>Jones, 2-3.

## CHAPTER 6

### CONCLUSION

#### Understanding Disasters

One of the key aspects of disasters such as the one experienced by the 31<sup>st</sup> RCT is that they are usually the result of numerous causes. The accumulated problems turn into a perfect storm that requires incredible intelligence to understand and inspired leadership to overcome. One major factor contributing to what happened to the 31<sup>st</sup> RCT was that the Chinese attack came on the very night after the scattered units of the regiment had arrived in the vicinity of Chosin Reservoir and had moved into temporary bivouacs for the night. Twenty-four hours later, even without its third infantry battalion (2/31 IN), the RCT would have had its combat power concentrated into a combined arms force capable of conducting mutually supporting maneuver. During the first night's attacks, 1/32 IN, 3/31 IN, 57<sup>th</sup> FA, CPT Drake's tank company and the 31<sup>st</sup> RCT HQ were all cut off from each other and incapable of supporting each other.

The lack of communications or efforts to establish communications (higher or lower) through the aircraft flying overhead ensured that units and commanders were unable to share information or coordinate their efforts. Thus leaders made decisions in a vacuum or on the basis of invalid information (such as that 2/31 IN would be arriving on the 28 November). The isolated units were not able to effectively communicate their most critical supply requirements including medical supplies and ammunition (fuel could not be air dropped).

The environment and terrain also played a key role in the destruction of the 31<sup>st</sup> RCT. The cold weather affected the ability of the soldiers and leaders to sleep and eat, led

to cold weather injuries and weapons problems, and some wounded soldiers who could not move froze to death. The effect of the cold weather was heightened by the lack of individual cold weather equipment (shoe packs as opposed to cold weather boots), tentage and warming equipment (stoves). Dominating terrain on the high ground and bridges/fording sites over the key streams bisecting the route of movement limited the options of the units and gave the Chinese observation on the US positions. The short time of daylight favored the Chinese who were vulnerable to US air power during the day and generally attacked at night. The mountainous terrain impeded communications between the units. In some cases, units did not even hear other units getting attacked just over the next spur of high ground. The falling snow obscured visibility, allowed the Chinese to approach units without being detected, and led to loss of unit cohesion as units lost sight of each other.

### Leadership and Intelligence

The Chinese surprise of UN forces in Korea is rightly considered to be one of the greatest intelligence failures of modern times. While a major part of this was the ability of the Chinese to conceal their movements and intentions, leadership played a key role in misinterpreting what the limited information available meant. This failure to understand the situation created a situation in which units were postured to conduct a pursuit against a defeated enemy when they should have been postured to conduct a defense instead. The failure to plan for and anticipate not only the ‘most likely’ enemy course of action but also the ‘most dangerous,’ created a situation from which the 31st RCT was not able to recover. Instead of anticipating the actions of the Chinese forces, X Corps was forced to react to them in a highly disadvantaged position. Thus, no other units (other than air

power) were able to support the units of the 31st RCT that were cut-off from other US units as a result of the first day of the Chinese attack.

Given the limited information available, it was probably not unreasonable to assume that the Chinese were in retreat. It was never clearly articulated what matter of Priority Intelligence Requirements might have called that assumption into question. Questions about what would need to happen if the Chinese did attack again were not asked. The offensive minded command environment that General MacArthur at Far East Command and LTG Almond in X Corps had created emphasized the need for speed and the occupation of territory at the expense of unit security or concentration of combat power. These decisions made at higher levels led to the local situation that the leaders of the 31st RCT were forced to attempt to overcome.

#### The Importance of Communication and Coordination

Communication proved to be a critical factor in the demise of the 31st RCT. The inability to communicate ensured that leaders could not coordinate the efforts. Isolated leaders such as COL MacLean and LTC Faith were reduced to making assumptions about what was happening elsewhere that had no bearing with reality (such as that 2/31 IN would arrive sometime on the 28 November or that the Marines were attempting to break through to them from Hagaru-ri in the south). In general BG Hodes, COL MacLean, and LTC Faith made assumptions that proved to be more optimistic than the actual situation warranted. While these assumptions had some basis in fact, these leaders seemed to have considered the negative opposite of these assumptions too late to influence their decision making. Their ability to validate their assumptions was limited by their difficulties in communication. However, because they had not clearly identified the most critical

assumptions, they did not make it a priority to find out if their assumptions were correct by communicating such concerns to the pilots flying overhead. It appears that most of the communications with the pilots tended to be urgent requests for air support, medical supplies, and ammunition rather than operational planning requirements.

By the same token, LTG Almond, MG Barr, BG Hodes, and MG Smith did not attempt to make contact with LTC Faith until it was too late. It was the policy at the time that upon loss of communication it was primarily the responsibility of the higher headquarters to re-establish communication. While MG Barr, BG Hodes and MG Smith all worked hard to provide whatever support they could to LTC Faith's surrounded unit, the only support that got through was the air drops of supplies and the crucial close air support coordinated through the 1/32 IN's Forward Air Controller (FAC), Capt. Stamford. None of the leaders at X Corps, 7th Division or the 1st Marine Division communicated to LTC Faith that the effort to breakthrough from the south on 29 November had failed and that it would be several days until enough Marines could be concentrated at Hagaru-ri to attempt to break through to LTC Faith's force from the south. It was not until late on the afternoon of 1 December, after LTC Faith had already begun his breakout attempt that MG Smith's message that LTC Faith should attempt to breakout on his own was received by LTC Faith.

### Encircled Forces and Breakouts

The destruction of the 31st RCT is a valuable case study about operations involving encircled forces. One of the key points about these types of operations is that an encircled force gradually loses combat power as it runs short of ammunition and supplies and casualties increase. The inability to evacuate casualties leads to increased

mortality of the wounded and becomes a drag on the unit commander's options if he is to conduct a successful breakout without abandoning his wounded to the enemy. The need to care for the wounded coupled with the requirement to maintain a defensible perimeter and fight off enemy attacks complicate the decision making of the leader of the encircled force.

In many cases the best thing to do in this kind of situation is to take care of the wounded and establish a defensible perimeter until larger forces can break through to the encircled unit. However, where the intervention of a breakthrough force is unrealistic as it was in this case, it is the responsibility of the higher unit to communicate to the encircled force that they must attempt to breakout on their own. In the case of the 31st RCT, this moment was reached on the afternoon of 29 November, when it was obvious that CPT Drake's tank company would not be able to break through from the south. Yet it was two days later (the afternoon of 1 December) that MG Smith's order for LTC Faith to attempt a break-out was received by LTC Faith. This delay gave the Chinese commander time to bring up to more regiments to attack LTC Faith's force and block his escape to the south.

#### Organizational Leadership is Decisive

The destruction of the 31st RCT can be directly related to the command decisions of the key leaders from the Corps level down to LTC Faith. While there were some failures of leadership levels below battalion (such as inadequate security at night), they alone can not explain this disaster. In general, the companies, platoons, squads and individual soldiers fought bravely and intelligently. The situation that they found themselves in was in the final analysis not of their own making. Decisions made at the



organizational level placed them in a situation in which the unit could not bring the full weight of the RCT's combat strength against the enemy. The three infantry battalions were dispersed and unable to support each other. The combined arms multipliers of the FA battalion with only two firing batteries, the anti-aircraft battery with a critical ground-to-ground capability and the tank company were likewise dispersed and unable to provide effective mutual support to the infantry battalions. While these individual units fought bravely, it was the responsibility of the organizational leaders to ensure that their efforts were coordinated. The decisions of LTC Faith and COL MacLean to start moving north before the RCT was concentrated created the unfavorable situation on the evening of the 27 November when the Chinese attacked. This key decision led to the desperate situation that the 31st RCT spent the next four days attempting to recover from.

Over the next four days, the 31st RCT gradually grew weaker and the Chinese grew stronger as they poured in two additional regiments to attack LTC Faith's surrounded forces. The unit failed to pull back and consolidate on the 28th when LTG Almond visited LTC Faith and failed to attempt a breakout from the inlet position on the 30th when the weather favored air support starting from sunrise. LTG Almond, BG Hodes, COL MacLean, and LTC Faith all had a part of the responsibility for these failures.

The fundamental question of all disasters is: Could they have been prevented? The most critical organizational leadership figures in this situation were LTG Almond, BG Hodes, COL MacLean, and LTC Faith. All four of these leaders were aggressive leaders who were brave, determined and enthusiastic in their own way. Their chief failure was in their ability to visualize the true situation given the capabilities of the Chinese.

They overestimated the capabilities of their own units especially given how dispersed they were. They all had tremendous energy. However, they were often focused on the task at hand and not what needed to happen or could happen in the next one to four days. This failure to take stock of the situation, especially as it deteriorated, doomed the 31st RCT. The leadership attributes of these leaders made them effective direct leaders. However at the organizational level, the attribute of intellectual capacity takes on an even more important role. The success or failure of their organizations would be the result of their ability to understand the situation, determine what needed to be done and ensure that it happened. Once they did realize the true state of affairs (that the Chinese were on the offensive with superior numbers), they were limited in the forces available to respond due to their failure to appreciate the capability of the Chinese forces to conduct major offensive operations.

In many ways, LTC Faith ultimately became the pivotal leader in this whole disaster. This is reflected in the relationships he had with both his superiors and his subordinates. The influence and direction that he received from his superiors, LTG Almond, MG Barr, and COL MacLean affected his decision making. In general, he received very poor guidance and direction from his superiors. There were three key failures. The first and most important was COL MacLean's approval on the evening of 26 November for LTC Faith to move forward out of the strong positions on hill 1221 before the artillery, tanks and anti-aircraft weapons arrived. The second was the visit of LTG Almond on the morning of the 28th after the night of the first Chinese attacks and after 1/32 IN failed to push the Chinese off the high ground to the east of the perimeter. The third and final failure that completed the disaster was the failure by LTG Almond, MG

Barr, BG Hodes or MG Smith to give LTC Faith a timely order to attempt a breakout. This lack of guidance resulted in LTC Faith conducting a breakout after his unit's combat power was even more reduced and allowed the Chinese to bring up more forces to complete the destruction of LTC Faith's force.

LTC Faith was blessed with highly competent and intelligent majors in critical positions, especially his executive officer, MAJ Miller, S3 operations officer, MAJ Curtis, and S1 personnel officer, MAJ Jones. According to these officers, they had attempted to counsel caution to LTC Faith based on the uncertainty of the disposition of the Chinese forces. LTC Faith finally decided to make a breakout attempt on the morning of 1 December at their urging.<sup>1</sup> In the final analysis, the role of the staff is to advise, while it is the responsibility of the commander to decide. Thus LTC Faith retains the final responsibility for the operational disposition of his battalion and the collection of 31st RCT units that he assumed command of on the morning of 29 November. LTC Faith was responsible for the breakout plan. However, his staff could have done a better job of helping him organize the breakout especially in the creation of intermediate objectives and a plan to consolidate in a defensive position before nightfall. LTC Faith was less well served by MAJ Storms and MAJ Tolley who assumed command of 2/31 IN and 57 FA respectively upon the wounding of LTC Reilly and LTC Embree. This is especially evident in their failure to properly brief their subordinate companies/batteries on their roles for the breakout attempt and the comment by CPT McClymont that he had had no contact with superior officers until LTC Faith's operations order briefing for the breakout. Some of these failures can be attributed to the extreme fatigue and exhaustion common to the surviving members of LTC Faith's force by this time.

By the time night fell on the evening of 1 December, LTC Faith's force had ceased to exist as an organization. The unit had ceased to function as a unit. The truck drivers had been killed or had abandoned their vehicles. As soldiers ran out of ammunition and lost contact with other soldiers in the dark they made their way as individuals or in groups across the ice on the reservoir to attempt to breakout on their own. The officers that had survived, most of whom were wounded, were no longer able to get their men to stay with the convoy. The instinct for individual survival was all that remained. There was no longer an organization for the organizational level leaders to lead.

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<sup>1</sup> Appleman, *East of Chosin*, 279.

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